

ONE OF THOSE COINCIDENCES
AND
TEN OTHER STORIES



Talking with us, he would break off to speak to Mr.



Talking with us, he would break off to make a...

ONE OF THOSE COINCIDENCES
AND
TEN OTHER STORIES

BY
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AND
J. H. B. B.

ELSK & WAGNALL COMPANY
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ONE OF THOSE COINCIDENCES

AND
TEN OTHER STORIES

BY
JULIAN HAWTHORNE
COUNT LEO TOLSTOY
CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS
FLORENCE M. KINGSLEY
AND OTHERS

Illustrated

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

NEW YORK AND LONDON

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One
of Those
Coincidences

By
Julian
Hawthorne

Illustrations
By
Florence
Carlyle

ONE OF THOSE COINCIDENCES

THERE is more fact than fancy in the following narrative.

Tom Forrest (let us call him) enlisted in the volunteers for the Cuban war. A full-throated, broad-shouldered, strong-limbed young fellow he was, with a frank, manly face and independent bearing. He had been brought up on a farm, was an open-air athlete, and was never ill in his twenty-three years of life. Clean was he in life, language, and person, jolly, liked by all. He spoke truth by instinct, could row a boat or sail it, hit out from the shoulder, plow a field and plant it, dance the heart out of or into a pretty girl, sleep nine hours off the reel, and eat enough for two men. He laughed contagiously. He dressed well when he did dress, but preferred knickerbockers and a sweater. The grip of his big warm hand told you that a man had hold of you—hearty, loyal, and guileless as a Newfoundland dog. He was intelligent, but no sage; and despite a spontaneous morality, fruit of a well-balanced organi-

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zation, he had no religious convictions—to his mother's and sisters' anxiety. For tho free from bad habits, he was insatiably social, and, without a Divine star to guide him, might, it was feared, go astray. But his material environment had always been so bounteous that talk about salvation and conviction of sin could not seriously affect him. He was sorry to hurt your feelings in this or any other matter, but—"I guess," he remarked to me one day, "there's a God, all right; but I can't get this Christian racket through me. It doesn't fetch me, you know," he added, as if comparing religious faith with a blow on the point of the jaw. "And unless things come from inside a fellow," he continued profoundly, "it doesn't connect. I'm awfully sorry mother feels as she does, but she wouldn't want me to lie to her; and there you are!" So, at church (where he went cheerfully), instead of yawning outright, he but expanded his nostrils; and that exercise in self-control was all the apparent good the service did him. For my own part, remembering what a boy he still was, I had hopes. Life sometimes reveals to us secrets we fail to explain to one another.

To Cuba he went, followed by devout prayers, and looking well with his uniform and rifle, his springy step and hereculean shoulders. His letters home were brief but comfortable; he liked camp-life, but was hungry both for victuals and fighting.

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Tropic heats troubled not one whose blood was un-
inflamed with alcohol, and who was used to tossing
hay in broiling northern suns. After the regiment
left Tampa we heard from him but once or twice;
after the landing and the fighting before El Caney
there was a silence which soon became ominous.

At length came a letter from one who had taken
part in the San Juan charge.

"You should have seen Tom going up that hill,"
ran the postscript. "He was great! At the top,
the Englishman, Arthur Lee, asked him, 'What
the deuce are you exposing yourself like that for?'
'Oh, I'm just drawing the Spanish fire!' said Tom;
and with that he was hit. It wasn't fatal, but he
got dysentery and fever later, and I lost sight of
him. Hope he's all right; but there's no telling!"

This was hard news. I pass over the heart-
breaking suspense and dread; many of us felt the
like that summer. I bore a good face to the poor
mother and sisters, but the odds were against him.

We were all down at Easthampton for the sum-
mer; when the transports began to arrive, we often
drove over the twenty miles to see the boys in their
tents. The day Tom's regiment—or such part of
it as could be crammed into the filthy steamer—
was due, I was at the landing with my camera. I
didn't dare tell myself I expected Tom, but there
was a chance. As the haggard men scrambled up
the slope, I snapped off one characteristic bit after

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another: a poor fellow, far gone, on a stretcher; a volunteer officer, plump and rosy and hectoring; a gaunt skeleton, with bony face half covered with a straggling black beard, eyes sunken and staring and gleaming with fever. I got a good portrait of this chap before recognizing that he was Tom!

I stepped up. "Hullo, boy! Glad to see you; we were beginning to fear——"

As our eyes met, he halted; his rifle dropped to the ground from his skeleton hands; he made a ghastly attempt to smile, and a husky noise came from his throat. His knees shook, he tilted forward and back, and collapsed. I caught him, feeling only bones in my arms; I laid him down gently; he was unconscious and, I thought, dead.

"None of that, now!" came the harsh voice of the plump officer. "No shamming! Get up, you loafer—you're all right!" And he kicked him in the ribs.

God will perhaps forgive me for what passed through my mind at that moment, the rather since I kept the words back from regard for Tom's interest. The officer has since been tried for cowardice in the face of the enemy, convicted, and drummed out of service. I gave him my card and asked for a furlough. Up came a surgeon—and to be brief, I was allowed to put Tom in my carriage and drive him to the general hospital to be seen by the surgeon-in-chief. He gave him a thirty-day furlough.

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On the drive home, Tom recovered consciousness, and told me, in broken sentences, several terrible and touching things; but the many things creditable to his courage and devotion I learned not from him, but from others, later. He fainted twice on the way; he shivered in the fresh sea air; all his clothing was a ragged undervest and an old linen tunic much too small for him; I wrapped him in the carriage blanket. At the door of his mother's cottage I lifted him out, and up the steps; just as the women rushed to the door he fainted again. Ah, what a meeting! I went across the street to call old Dr. James, who had known him from childhood. "You were just in time; twelve hours more and he'd have been dead; would die any way, but he has a constitution like a—politician!" quoth the old gentleman, after the examination. "Fevers, dysentery, and starvation on top of all, with the Mauser bullet-hole through his shoulder!" The doctor then made remarks reflecting on the powers that be, which, tho very quotable, I won't quote. Said I:

"Will he pull through?"

"We'll see!" grunted the doctor behind his gray moustache; and turned away.

People may hold what opinions on religious subjects they please; there could be but one opinion as to the way Tom's mother and sisters nursed him. Dr. James did all possible in the way of the phar-

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macopoeia and regimen; but the tenderness, sleepless vigilance, firmness, faith, and love of those three women were more angelic than mortal; and thousands of women all over America were doing the same thing. Tom was much too ill to know it; he was difficult, contrary, persuaded that he was abused, and most of the time was delirious. He thought us all in league to maltreat and destroy him; he said he would get well at once if we would but let him have his own way. He accused the doctor of murderous crimes, and quoted amazing orders from some source unnamed which were urgent, and indispensable to his recovery. He pushed away his gruel, and declared he had just got up from table at Delmonico's; was convinced his medicines were subtle poisons; bade the poor women "cut his throat and done with it, if they wanted him dead"; and mingling with this were agonies of dread lest "they"—meaning the War Department—would kidnap him, set him on guard duty, try him by court-martial, and force him to bury his dead comrades under a hail of Spanish bullets. Often he thought himself dead, and protested against burying his body in a Cuban rifle-pit. All this and much more of the kind was commonplace enough; how many families are there, up and down this country, who have heard and seen the boys they love best going through the same?

Commonplace, too, however thrilling, were the

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ravings of his delirium. Frightful pictures reek-
ing from the battle-field and the subsequent hor-
rors rose in his mind and painted themselves here
—there—as his trembling finger and starting eye-
balls indicated; then with a shrill groan he would
bury his wasted face in the bed-clothes and gurg-
le out piteous entreaties. As one contemplated this
spectacle week after week, one gradually realized
through what a valley of torture and outrage and
death this boy (who looked sixty, and next thing to
a corpse) must have passed to bring his masculine
vigor and kindly serenity to this extremity. He
resembled our clear-eyed, ruddy Tom about as much
as if he had been an Aztec mummy in convulsions.
But I allude to it only to introduce another feature
that was, I think, less ordinary.

For midway through his illness a new character
came on the scene; to be accurate, she was seen by
none save Tom himself. Miss Holland, he called
her; then, as they grew intimate, Mercy. Mercy
Holland became for him the chief person in the
house, if not in the world. He was full of her
sayings and doings, ideas and counsels; but he
never described her appearance to us, because he
thought we saw her as well as he did. He deemed
her natural and inevitable; she could not have been
other or elsewhere than she was. Talking with
us, he would break off to speak to Mercy; would
smile to her at any amusing or surprising thing;

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would have her called—she had gone upstairs, it seemed; would insist that she, no one else, should minister to him. She was more real than what we called real persons, to him; we were shadows in his dream and she the fact. As he lay alone, we heard his murmuring talk with her through the half-open door. "Where's that list of things she made for me?" he asked. He thrust his hand in his breast, seemed to find it, and held it out to his sister. "But where is it, dear?" she asked. He stared at his empty fingers. "Extraordinary!" he muttered; "it disappeared right while I was looking at it!"

In short, this vision, phantom, spirit, or whatever she was, became so familiar and recognized a denizen of the house that we ourselves half believed that she was a reality, and we got to inquiring after her, not from Tom only, but of one another. It may be recorded to the lasting honor of the three ladies that they evinced no jealousy of Mercy, tho they were never in the right (with Tom) and she always was. He was indignant that they ignored her, replied not when she addressed them; the poor souls tried their best to amend, but how could they converse animatedly with empty air? But for one reason at least they blessed Mercy: from the start she had immense influence over Tom in religious matters.

Illness had stripped his nature of winning traits

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as it had his body of flesh and health. Surly, cantankerous, suspicious, abominably selfish he was. Alas! how much we owe to sound digestion and lively circulation of the blood! The trained athlete sees no need of being born again; but when he rubs elbows with death, his friends at least admit that it would be a good thing. Now Mercy did succeed at last in mending the rents in Tom's temper to some extent. And—"I never got hold of religion before," he told me with immense earnestness; "but Mercy explains it—I'm never tired listening to her. It's glorious—so simple and beautiful! No one but Mercy knows what a divine thing it is; but she never speaks of it except when we're alone. All these years I've been a soulless beast, when I might have been helping people to heaven! Just her voice makes a fellow ashamed not to be good: low and sweet—it goes ringing through you like a lovely bell! I guess she's an angel, sent back here to save the world. Thank the Lord, she came to me before it was too late!"

He often rhapsodized thus, with impressive conviction even to a man of the world like me. His mother and sisters were fully convinced that an angel did indeed commune with him, and was bringing him to Christ. They rejoiced, yet with fear, lest she might take him with her at last to the heaven whence she came. "It's only a crazy boy's imagination," said I; and they were divided

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between resentment at my agnosticism and a secret hope I might be right. I was tempted to ask, "Would you rather Tom lived unspiritual, or died converted?" but not being actively diabolic, I refrained. Besides, "I don't feel safe about him while that Mercy Holland nonsense keeps on," Dr. James had once remarked, mounting his wheel at the door.

But Tom improved inch by inch; one day a barber shaved him; his flesh began to appear; he sat up; walked to a chair; got downstairs (memorable day!). His eyes were still unnaturally big, with sometimes a queer roll and shine to them; but he discriminated better between dream-scenery and concrete things; and when, one day, he positively set up a thin cachinnation, the village heard the news. His temper improved *pari passu*, and day by day years seemed to drop from his age, till he got back once more to his twenties. Meanwhile, what of Mercy?

Impereceptibly she faded away. I watched her disappearance with deep interest. One day, entering Tom's room, I found him searching his pockets with great diligence and increasing anxiety; and as he looked up at me, I saw tears standing in his eyes; for he was still ridiculously weak.

"I've mislaid my crystal," said he, in reply to my question. "I couldn't bear to lose it—I couldn't bear it!"

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"Your crystal? What crystal?"

"Why, that one Mercy gave me. I always wear it with a string round my neck, so I can feel it against my heart. It's oval, about the size of a hazelnut, with a gold rim round it, and inside was a tiny curl of her baby hair; her hair is dark now, of course, but when she was a baby it was golden. By Jove! I'd rather lose anything than that crystal: she gave it me herself—she took it off her neck and——"

His strained voice quavered and broke; there sat the once strong man, sobbing and crying!

"My dear boy," said I, as kindly as I could, sitting down by him and meeting his eyes, "dreams sometimes come true; but anyhow, Mercy Holland was a dream. The waking world is not always as pleasant as dreamland; but you live in it, and you must awake!"

He stared at me with naive perplexity. "Maybe she was a dream; yes, I guess she must have been," he said at last. "But the crystal was real, for she gave it me with her own hands, and I promised her always to wear it; why, I've—I've kissed it a hundred times! You don't mean to tell me my crystal doesn't exist, do you?" His voice went up to a half-angry, half-frightened shrillness. "As well say I don't exist myself!"

"The crystal must be all right, of course," said I comfortably. "Think it all over quietly, and

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you'll remember what you did with it. Solid crystals don't vanish into thin air, tho the girls of dreamland do. Meanwhile, Tom, I have news for you. Dr. James says you are to have beef-steak for dinner to-day!" In this manner did I guilefully woo him from the transcendental to the material; for man has a stomach as well as a soul, and the former is sometimes not incapable of doing the latter a good turn.

It occurred to me, too, that the boy might have got hold of a crystal somehow, and then have imagined that Mercy gave it to him; but for this hypothesis I found, upon inquiry, no basis whatever. The women knew, of course, what poor Tom had on him; and they all affirmed that no such thing as the crystal he described, or anything resembling it, had ever been seen. Tom said no more about it to me; but I learned that, during the next few days, he secretly and separately appealed to each of his faithful nurses for information about it, and evinced the most acute distress, approaching despair, at their failure to give him news of it. I am not sure that he ever did entirely recover from that particular delusion; and, as you will presently see—but I won't anticipate.

Mercy, I say, disappeared gradually; he evidently saw less and less of her, and was adjusting himself to the difficult idea that she may have been an hallucination from the first. If he started

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to mention her, he would check himself with a silly smile. Finally he reached the point of brazenly ridiculing himself for ever having believed in her. And yet I fancy that deep down in his soul he still believed that somehow she was a truth; that the mere fact of her having no substantial existence did not altogether dispose of her. The situation was not lacking in a certain pathos. Meanwhile, coincidently with her evanishment, there was a cessation of religious conversation on his part. He never volunteered any remarks in that direction, and suggestions on the subject met with no response from him. Had his faith in salvation been destroyed along with his faith in Mercy's reality? It did look a little that way, and his family confessed their anxiety; but I told them that he was probably only a bit shy of discussing the topic so nearly allied with his delirious vagaries. When he was quite well we should find that his spiritual enlightenment persisted. Providence has its own mysterious ways of touching our hearts. The good ladies tried to agree with me; but Tom's reticence continued long after he had taken his first bicycle ride, and was accounted cured.

Summer over, we all moved in town, and opened the regular fall and winter campaign. I ran across an old friend, Judge Horne, whom I had hardly seen in twenty years. He was one of those lawyers who get \$50,000 for a retaining-fee. His name

ONE OF THOSE COINCIDENCES

was mentioned in connection with the ambassadorship to England; but he preferred New York. And "I don't want Mollie marrying any British peer, either," he remarked.

"I have never had the pleasure of meeting Miss Horne," said I. "It seems strange, Bob, to think of you with a marriageable daughter! *Labuntur anni! Posthume, Posthume!*"

"She's not my own daughter," replied the judge. "When my dear wife died, twelve years back, I was left a widower and childless. Mollie (as I call her) is the child of one of my clients, who came to grief. She's been the angel in my house ever since she first came there, at six years old. She'll have all I've got, of course; but the man who marries her will have more than the riches of this world!"

"Any one in sight yet?" I inquired.

"No," answered the great jurist slowly. "And I doubt if Mollie is a marrying girl. Her thoughts are elsewhere. I thought I'd lost her in this war."

"In this war! Oh, she was a nurse, I suppose?"

"Yes; and many a poor fellow owes his life to her. But she took ill herself at last, and for a month she was on the brink! Exactly what ailed her nobody could tell. She would go off into long trances; and when she came to, she would refer to some young man she thought she had been tend-

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ing—ministering to his soul, it appeared, as well as to his body. 'I shall save him,' she would say; 'he's a noble, good fellow, but he has never known our Lord.' It was a singular case, because she always alluded to this same young man, and described his progress under her care day after day, until he was out of danger."

"A soldier, of course?"

"Yes; a private in one of the regiments in the San Juan fight, she said. Was wounded, and got all the fevers. You would have thought he was a flesh-and-blood reality, to hear her talk of him. She even imagined she had given him a keepsake—some little ornament that had belonged to her grandmother."

"What was it?" I asked, as a queer thought dashed into my mind.

"Oh, a little crystal locket, with a bit of yellow hair in it—baby hair, I presume. She has always worn it round her neck. She fancied she had given it to him, and was a good deal puzzled when she found it in her jewel-box after she got well."

This talk was in the club. I said no more at the time; I felt it necessary to think. But I accepted an invitation to dine with the judge at his house that evening and meet Miss Mollie. A lovely girl she turned out to be, with dark hair and eyes, a pale, mystic face, and a mouth which I can only call divinely beautiful. "You never met Tom

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Forrest, who distinguished himself at San Juan? I took occasion to ask her during the evening.

"I may have met him in the hospital without knowing his name," she said. Her voice was exquisite—low, distinct, and tender.

"No, he didn't get into the hospital," I replied. "He was caught at the landing and taken right home. He had a remarkable hallucination during his illness, Bob," I added, turning to the judge. "He fancied he was tended by a young woman whom he called Mercy Holland. She seemed to have a strong religious influence over him—he had been rather deficient in that way previously. She almost came to seem a reality to us at last. He declared she had given him some memento, and was much distressed when he couldn't find it. 'We are such stuff as dreams are made of,' " I added, smiling.

I had shot my bolt; did it hit the mark? I could not tell. The judge apparently took little notice, and soon changed the subject (but Mollie lapsed into a star-eyed silence). After dinner, in the drawing-room, I took a seat beside her. I had already noticed a slender gold chain round her throat; she had now drawn out the pendant that was attached to it, and was turning it between her slender fingers. It was an egg-shaped crystal about three quarters of an inch long, and there was a golden gleam from within it.

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"My grandmother's name—her maiden name—was Mercy Holland," said she; "and my Christian name is the same as hers, though I am called Mollie."

"Is that her hair in the locket?" I asked.

"I have always supposed so," said she.

She took it very quietly; but I felt that I was treading on holy ground. "I would like to bring my friend Tom Forrest to see you," I said after a while.

"Yes, I must see him," she replied, with a slight tremor in her wonderful voice. She comprehended the situation, but it did not astonish her. Persons who, like her, live in the spirit have their own interpretation of what we prefer to call coincidences.

The meeting, as it chanced, took place accidentally on the avenue, where I was walking with Tom three days later. I had told him nothing. She came walking toward us, alone, but stopped as she recognized me. "Here's a friend of mine I want you to know," said I, indicating Tom. Neither of them knew the other; but when she spoke, Tom started, and he always insisted afterward that he recognized her voice. "I spoke to you of Tom Forrest, you know," I said to her. She looked earnestly in his face, and a shade of perplexity or disappointment darkened in her eyes. Now, Tom had grown absurdly fat since his illness, and seemed

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a full twenty pounds heavier than he had been before enlisting. I put my hand in my pocket, and pulled out the photograph I had taken of him when he came up from the landing at Wykoff. She glanced at the gaunt, bearded countenance; her own face lightened with a marvelous, maidenly radiance, and she put out her hand.

"But you haven't told him my name," she said to me.

Then Tom's eyes were opened. ("Mercy Holland!" said he.)

I am an annalist, not a prophet; and I have brought this tale up to date—the meeting occurred only a week ago. What the end will be, you can surmise to suit yourself; all I can add, at present, is that Tom has the crystal locket. As to explanations, I have absolutely none to offer.

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Mercy Holland," said he.

Francisco

By
Wolcott Le Clear Beard

Illustrations

By
Charles Johnson Post

FRANCISCO

PART I.

THE hour and method chosen by Francisco for making our acquaintance—the acquaintance of Company M of the 15th—were, to say the least, uncommon. That was not so strange—most things that Francisco did were uncommon—but the method also lacked that dignity which has always been one of Francisco's strongest points.

We were a one-company post, detached from our regiment and stationed on the great military road which divides Puerto Rico in halves to keep order along a portion of its length. The hour was about two in the morning, the night had been fearfully hot, and I, unable to sleep, was still tossing uneasily on my camp-cot in the lieutenants' tent at the head of the company street when there came the crack of a pistol-shot faint in the distance. I sat up and listened. Then followed another report, still another, and finally a scattering volley, sounding like a distant pack of firecrackers. I

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jumped out of bed and began frantically to scramble into my uniform—just as one of the sentinels fired his rifle and called for the guard.

In an instant the camp was humming like a beehive. Men were tumbling out as non-commissioned officers in sketchy attire ran from one tent to another and the bugles blew the shrill call to arms. By the time I stepped forth, hooking my belt as I went, the men were standing in an excited but orderly line. The flaps of the captain's tent parted, and his head poked out.

"I don't want to go, and you're the only other company officer," quoth he sleepily. "You know what to do. If you find any guerrillas, bring them back and put them in the guard-house until morning. If you catch anybody and don't know whether he's a guerrilla or not, give him the benefit of the doubt and bring him in anyhow. See you at breakfast." The captain's head vanished before it finished speaking.

With a rattle of breech-blocks and magazines the pieces were loaded and locked; the bayonets glanced in the watery moonlight as they left their scabbards. More shots, yells, and a red glare in the sky gave an extra spring to the legs of the company as it wheeled into a column of fours and with its army brogans pounded the macadam of the great road. The glare diminished as we went, but the shooting increased, and so did the yells.

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No Puerto Rican can do anything without yelling. From the sounds, we were drawing nearer the scene of action; then a turn in the road brought us within sight of it.

In the center of a square field surrounded on three sides by banana-plantations stood a house—evidently a place of some importance, for it was large and built of brick. Several native huts of flimsy thatch had been standing near it, but now their sites were marked only by piles of glowing coals, around which stood their former inhabitants, gazing in terror at the crowd of men which ranged about the great house. By the dim moonlight, aided by the dull, red glow of the coals, we could see this crowd only as a black mass—a yelling, shifting mass—from which issued spirits of flame, yells, and reports of pistols as it swayed this way and that in front of the veranda which shadowed the door.

"Shall I get off the flankin' parties, sorr?" whispered Sergeant Clancy. I nodded—I had been about to give the order. Three detachments: one to each side and one to the back of the field. Each party on reaching its station was to extend its line and cover the side assigned to it, while the rest of the company deployed under cover of the pineapple-hedge that divided the field from the road.

Suddenly several men darted from the yelling crowd and ran toward the veranda steps. They

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did not get far. A red flash streaked the darkness, accompanied by the resounding bang of a shotgun. Nobody seemed hurt—I could hear the shot tearing through the leaves of the banana-palms—but it had a wonderful effect. The men who had started for the house ran much faster in the opposite direction, and the crowd scattered like the pieces of a bursting shell. In another moment, tho, it reassembled, yelping shrill curses at those within.

"Them fellers is the native population, sorr, I'm thinkin'," said First Sergeant Clancy, in a low tone. "They're makin' an effort to get even with the Spanishers what lives in that house. See! They're a-thryin' it again." Sure enough, they did "thry it again," and again the shotgun spoke—and this time with more success. No one fell, it is true, but some yells that followed were yells of pain and not of rage alone. The men laughed, yet they fidgeted nervously as they lay on the ground behind the hedge; the non-commissioned officers spoke to them in gruff whispers, telling them to wait and give the flanking parties time to reach their posts. The men had not long to wait. A shrill whistle coming from one side of the rectangular field was answered after short intervals by other whistles from the remaining two sides. Then at a nod from me a bugler jumped to his feet and, running a little way into the field,

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began to blow. He was a young bugler, and was much excited. Instead of the "assembly," which he was to have sounded, the jerky notes of the mess-call sounded through the air:

"Porky, porky, porky,
Come and get your beans."

With a yell, half laugh and half cheer, the men sprang to their feet and rushed forward. Then for the first time the assailants saw us. The crowd dissolved like a puff of smoke, and those who had composed it ran in frantic efforts to escape first to one, then another side of the field—only to be turned back by the rows of shining bayonets which met them. The bayonets advanced, drawing nearer together as they did so. It was all over in a few minutes. The company, standing in a hollow square, faced inward, surrounding a frightened, dejected herd of men, who stood huddled together, thoroughly convinced that they had been so gathered ready for the slaughter which their former masters, the Spaniards, had so often told them was the invariable American custom. Our prisoners were much relieved, therefore, when, instead of being killed, they were merely marched under guard to the road and held there. They thought, as I afterward discovered, that the massacre would without doubt come later; still, it was a reprieve.

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In the mean time the ground was once more carefully drawn by a line of men, with the resulting discovery of one or two stragglers who had hidden themselves here and there behind bushes and the like. They were sent to join the others.

The house itself remained dark and silent. Whether or not any one inside had been hurt, it was impossible to say.

"Who is there in the house?" I called in Spanish. I waited, and receiving no reply, I repeated the question.

"I am here—and others," a shrill voice at last answered. "Leave us. He who attempts to come in will be shot."

"It's a boy," whispered Sergeant Clancy,—"or a gurrul." As he spoke he incautiously showed himself. A gun-barrel immediately protruded from a hole in the door—from where I stood I could see it against the sky. A click followed, as tho the hammer had fallen on an empty shell. There was a cry of disappointment, and the gun-barrel vanished. The door of the house was thrown open; we could hear the creak of the hinges, but could see nothing—it was too dark.

Sergeant Clancy, who stood nearest the steps, darted up, and I followed. There was a scrambling rush and a howl; the sergeant flew backward down the steps, crushing me nearly to the bottom

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in his flight. As he passed into the moonlight I saw that he was doubled over the head of a goat—a male goat of truly phenomenal size, who had hit the sergeant exactly on the belt, doubling him up like a foot-rule. Hard on the heels of the goat ran a small boy, shrieking encouragement to him and defiance to us, and brandishing a huge machete. As I stepped forward he raised his weapon and aimed a fierce cut at my head. Instinctively I parried the stroke with my sword, at the same time catching his wrist with my left hand and passing him down to the men below me. Then I had time to look around.

The sergeant lay gasping on the ground, and the goat was cautiously backing off, nodding his head, and making ready for another blow. Two men, stepping forward, caught his horns. Then he reared, plunged, and struggled. One of the men tripped and fell, pulling the goat and the other man over on top of him. In an instant the mixture of legs, horns, and rifles was so thorough that the eye was quite unable to distinguish which portions belonged together. The two men implored help, but their comrades, faint with laughter, looked gleefully on and did not stir.

It was only by my most imperative orders that some of the men at last interfered and brought the billy-goat, still anxious to fight, to a reluctant stand—just as the first sergeant sat up and looked

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about him. At first he appeared a little dazed; but he rose, and, still puffing from the effect of the blow, he walked over to the boy and caught him by the collar of his shirt.

"Is there anny wan hurrtd in that house, me young man?" he inquired. Somebody translated the question, and the boy shook his head. Then the sergeant shifted his hold from the shirt-collar to the ear of its wearer, picked up the machete from the ground where it had fallen, and walked over to the steps. He sat down, and, laying the lad carefully across his blue-clad knee, with the flat side of the machete he administered as sound a spanking as ever a boy received since the world began.

"I beg pardon, lootinint," he said, rising and saluting as the operation was finished; "I thought sorr, 'twas best so. 'Twas a good fight he put up, sorr, an' he only a boy. I thought that maybe 'twouldn't be nec'ary to arrist him with the others."

I quite agreed with the sergeant. Certainly the boy had already enough punishment to satisfy any reasonable person, and I willingly agreed that he should not be "arristed." I turned to tell him so; but he had apparently come to the same conclusion. At all events he had disappeared.

For some minutes the sky had been clouding, and now the sudden rain of those latitudes began

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to descend in sheets. It was very dark. The guards around the prisoners were trebled in number, and, hurriedly forming the company, we splashed homeward along the road. The water filtered thru our campaign-hats, and we were soaked to the skin in an instant. The very sound of our footsteps was drowned by the roar of the rain as it beat on the stiff leaves of the palm-trees that lined our path.

It was not my turn to take reveille roll-call the next morning, and I slept late. When at last I was dressed and strolled over to our extemporized mess-tent, hungry and more than ready for breakfast, I found my usual seat on one of the benches which served as chairs taken up by what appeared to be a large bundle of blankets. I was about to tumble it to the ground when Brown, my servant, caught my arm.

"Beg yer pardon, loot'nant," said he apologetically. "I didn't have time to speak. That's Sanfro, sir."

"He means Sanfrisco, sir," explained Harkins, the captain's "striker," who was present, with a look of pity at my man.

"Who on earth is Sanfrisco? and where?" I asked, much puzzled. At that moment the bundle of blankets began to squirm. From one end a head presently issued, followed by the body belonging to it, and in a moment the boy who had disap-

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peared the night before rolled on to the ground and scrambled to his feet. He came to attention and saluted as he had seen the men do.

"It is I, señor. Francisco, the man intended to say," said he, looking up at me. He had a singularly attractive face, with the largest brown eyes and the whitest teeth I had ever seen. Tho he was very dark, it was quite evident that no negro blood flowed in his veins.

"How did you get here?" I inquired.

"I wish to explain, señor. I have already done so to the other officer, Señor el Capitan," he answered, with the gravity of one Spanish grandee addressing another. "Last night I found it necessary to defend the house. Those who were attacking were my countrymen, and the man and his wife who lived in the house were Spanish; but they were old and helpless, and had been good to me. And then the soldiers came. They, too, are against the Spanish, and I therefore continued to fight. When I found that they had come to protect the old man and his wife, I was sorry, but I did not tell you so at that time, Señor el Teniente, for you would have said that I was afraid. Then I came here. The sentinel turned me back, but I passed him when he was looking another way, and with me came Borinquen——"

"That's his goat, sir," explained Brown, who had caught the name, pointing to that valiant ani-

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mal, who, tied to the wheel of a wagon, was composedly cropping the rich grass.

"This morning," Francisco went on, "these men met me. They took me before Señor el Capitan, who commanded that I be dressed thus, and fed, and wrapped up as you saw me. Truly it was warm." Then for the first time I noticed that Francisco wore a pair of army trousers and a flannel shirt. Both the sleeves and the trousers-legs were turned up until there was little of them left, but even at that they were too long.

"What do you intend to do now, Francisco?" I ventured to inquire, somewhat appalled by his dignity.

"I am an American, señor, and it is proper that I should become a soldier of the United States. I intend to enlist in this company, and Borinquen also." The two men respectfully stifled a laugh as the boy finished, and, turning about, departed.

That Francisco had adopted us for his own, there could be no doubt. He made that fact evident with a calm positiveness that was all his own. Every one liked the boy, and he soon became as much a part of the half-military, half-pastoral life that we led in that out-of-the-way place as tho he had really enlisted in the company—as, in truth, he thought he had. This belief on his part was due, as we afterward discovered, to a prank on the part of some of the men, who had put him thru an

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"initiation" which they solemnly assured him was the regular way of joining the army. We also learned that the pluck with which the boy had gone thru with these ordeals contributed largely to his popularity. Among the firmest of Francisco's friends was the first sergeant. For the boy's sake he even tolerated Borinquen, notwithstanding the fact that this redoubtable animal still cherished a grudge against his ancient foe, and never missed an opportunity of trying to repeat the exploit of their first meeting. He never succeeded, however. One such affair was enough, and the sergeant was wary.

A few days after Francisco's arrival his cup of happiness was nearly filled, for he appeared in full uniform, cut down to fit him by the company tailor. Even the campaign-hat was there; but as it was impossible to cut that down, it became necessary to stuff paper under the inner band in order to make it small enough. This gave our recruit a somewhat mushroom-like appearance; but the glittering brass ornament with which the hat was decorated more than made up for any small shortcomings. After this he fell in with the company at all roll-calls, never missing one, and seemed to learn the drill almost by intuition. Yet there was something lacking. He, a "soldado Americano," had no rifle. Tho he fully understood that the men had but one apiece, and that therefore there

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He requested three days' leave of absence.

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was none left for him, yet it troubled him nothing less for that.

For some days Francisco studied this problem, then he went to the captain and requested three days' leave of absence. The captain was amused; Francisco was a great favorite of his, tho he seldom showed it. "Well, Francisco," said he, "from what I hear, you have been taking a leave of absence every day, yet this is the first time you have asked me for a pass."

"That is true, señor," acknowledged the boy frankly; "but then I needed no pass. I went by the guard-house in the long grass, or when the sentinel was not looking, just as the other soldiers do."

Here some of the men who had been loitering about to hear what Francisco had to say left hurriedly, pursued by the subdued chuckles of their comrades.

"Do you know what happens to the other soldiers, as you call them, when they try to run the guard?" asked the captain, trying to hide a smile.

"Truly I do, señor. They are put in the guard-house and made to work at unpleasant tasks," replied Francisco composedly, "when they are caught."

"Then, Francisco, why should I not do the same to you?"

"Because, señor, I have not been caught."

"There's unanswerable logic in that," said the

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captain to me, turning to his field-desk in order to write out a pass. "I don't think he had a notion that the men were doing anything wrong when they ran the guard, and they couldn't tell him—he don't know a word of English. He fancied it was a sort of game between them and the officers." He handed the pass to Francisco, explaining to him at the same time the nature of the offense of which he had been guilty. The way that Francisco received the explanation was ample corroboration of the captain's theory. Indeed, the look of utter contempt which he cast at one or two of the men known to have offended in the same way was proof in itself.

Francisco took the pass, saluted, and making an accurate "about face," departed to prepare for his journey. The captain watched him as he went. "I hesitated at first," said he, after a pause; "but now, do you know, I'm sure that it's a good thing to have that boy about, for the company as well as for him. He's absolutely honest. Did you see how uncomfortable those men looked when he glanced at them? And some of the others are making all manner of fun of them now—you can see, down by the cook-house, there. It will tend to raise the standard. It won't be my fault if it doesn't, anyway."

"Nor mine," said I. "I wonder what he wanted to go away for? To see his parents?"

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The captain started. "I never thought to ask him," said he. "He hasn't any parents, and no relatives; I found that out days ago. But he'll be back at the end of the three days. He said he would, and he will."

PART II.

DURING the time that Francisco was gone there was considerable speculation among the men as to where he was and whether or not he would return. That he fully intended to return I never had a moment's doubt; but as the time drew near I began to be troubled for fear something had happened to him. We had no idea where he was; the moment he passed the guard-house he seemed to have vanished into thin air.

On the afternoon of the third day the captain was absent, and I, therefore, in command. I was sitting at the door of my tent when the first sergeant came up. "Well?" I inquired.

"The kid, sorr. Fran—San—Fran—Sanfrancisco, sorr. He's come back. An' he's got a goon."

"Got a gun? Where on earth did he get it?"

"I dunno, sorr, but he's got it, an' a belt too. He's in my tent now, elanin' himself to come an' report. Here he is." The sergeant fell back with a grin that was stopped only by his ears as

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Francisco, his uniform spotlessly neat, issued from the tent. Over his shoulder was a cavalry carbine, and a cartridge-belt encircled his waist. But it was not a belt such as our soldiers used; I noticed that instantly. He came to the tent door, halted, and saluted, but this time he made the rifle salute.

"I have returned, Señor el Teniente," said he. "It was necessary that I should have a rifle, and so I went and got one."

"So I see, Francisco; but where did you get it?" I asked.

"Señor, I took it from the enemy. Their guard is not strict when it sees boys like me, there are so many boys, and I had taken off my uniform. I chose the rifle of the cavalry, for it is shorter than the others, and I am small. Two belts I brought, both of them full. The other is now in the tent of El Sargento Clan-see."

"What is that he says, sorr?" asked the sergeant. I translated, and he looked amazed, as well he might. It was rather stupendous, this feat of Francisco's. The Spanish lines were about eighteen miles away, and this boy in some way had passed their guards, made his way to a camp of cavalry or artillery, got his rifle and two belts, and then returned—and all in something under three days.

"I think you can not know what the Spaniards

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would have done to you if they had caught you," I said severely.

"Yes, señor, they would have killed me," he calmly replied. And there is no doubt but what they would have done so. I took the carbine from him and inspected it. Sure enough, it was a Mauser, such as the Spanish use, and differing in several important details from our Krag-Jørgensen. The belt, too, as I had noticed before, had not loops for single cartridges like ours, but pockets for groups of five, held together in their tin clips.

I returned the rifle to Francisco and dismissed him. I was somewhat in doubt at first as to what to do about the case, yet, when I came to think about it, there was no good reason that I could see why I should take from the boy his hard-earned prize. Certainly I had no right to return captured arms to the enemy, and no orders had been issued from headquarters as to the disposition of such weapons. In fact, as far as I know, this rifle was the first one to be captured in Puerto Rico. Time enough to be thinking about taking it away from Francisco when such orders should be issued. So I left it all to the captain, and when he returned he decided as I had done.

Sergeant Clancy repeated with full detail Francisco's exploit to the other men, and many of them were very much inclined to make a hero of the boy; but of that he knew little, not understanding the

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language, and probably caring less. To him the important thing was that he now had his rifle, and could fall in with the others at drill, as, in spite of his fatigue, he did that very afternoon. His observations of the drills had been close, and this now helped him, so that his performance was exceedingly creditable. It was so creditable, indeed, that the first sergeant took occasion, when I had left him to dismiss the men, of holding Francisco up as an example to be followed by the company.

"If anny av you men happened to be breakin' reg'lations by squintin' to wan side durin' the dhrill," said he, "I wondher that ye were not 'shamed when ye saw that boy. I'm not sayin' that ye did so badly, but this is *his* first dhrill, an' I don't think ther's wan av you that can beat him, even so. Port ar-rms! Dismissed! But all the same," he went on, speaking in a lower tone and addressing Francisco, "when you've had as much av this sort of thing as the other boys have you'll not be so keen on it, I'm thinkin', me son."

Francisco, not understanding a word, only grinned and saluted by way of answer, and ran to wrap up his precious rifle and safely deposit it in one of the tents before untying Borinquen.

Whenever Francisco was not engaged in duties, military or otherwise, where a goat would be quite impossible, he and Borinquen were nearly always together. Indeed, orders had been issued to that

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effect: that when Francisco was not with him Borinquen was to be tied. This happened when, one day, I found that rthy animal lying on my cot, eating with every appearance of relish a court-martial report which I had just finished copying. Borinquen left my tent with some rapidity, just missing, as he went, one of the men who had come to complain of a grievance similar to mine.

"I'd just washed a pair o' stockin's, sir, an' hung 'em out," he said, "an' found this here goat, sir, just finishin' one of 'em an' gettin' ready to commence on the other. When I hollered at him he just wagged his whiskers at me an' then bunted me over." This act on the part of Borinquen, the man hastened to explain, was all done in a playful and thoroughly friendly spirit; still, the quartermaster's department didn't issue stockings with any intention of having them fed to goats. And it isn't pleasant to be bunted over, either.

When in the company of his master, however, Borinquen was as harmless as possible; but as time went on he had less and less of this company, and at last, when in the camp, he was nearly always tied. Francisco was busy about things in which the goat could not assist. He took to doing little odd jobs for the men—washing their tin plates, running errands, and the like. For each of these services they would offer him two or three of the enormous coppers of Puerto Rico, which he accept-

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ed with evident reluctance—but which, nevertheless, he did accept.

Francisco's daily absences continued. He never ran the guard after he had promised not to, but the captain, tired of daily filling out a pass for the boy, had given him one "good until revoked." Armed with this, he would fit a pair of small saddle-bags, manufactured by himself, on the back of Borinquen, and the two would vanish and be gone for hours. The pennies earned by Francisco apparently went with him on these expeditions, but he never seemed to spend any of them. Francisco's money got to be a joke in the company. Some of the men who could speak a little Spanish would ask him what interest he would charge in lending a large sum; or talk of waiting for a dark night and then robbing him. The boy really seemed to get money for no other purpose than to hoard it. He worked harder and harder; and at last he began to neglect somewhat the appearance of military neatness and the duties of which he was so proud. Then I began to feel a regretful disappointment in Francisco, and so, I know, did the captain. But worse was to follow.

That food had in a mysterious manner been disappearing from our commissary tent was beyond question. For weeks the cooks had been complaining of it, and Petersen, the melancholy Swedish sergeant in charge of our food supplies, had vainly

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laid trap after trap to catch the thief. Short ra-
tions, to men in the field, is not a joking matter.
Various theories, all of them absurd, as to the
identity of the guilty one were advanced, and each
man looked on his neighbor with suspicion, but to
no avail. Then a faint rumor that Francisco was
suspected came to our ears.

The captain disbelieved this story utterly; so
did I; and when Sergeant Clancy was called in and
questioned he agreed with us. The commissary
tent was rigidly guarded, and even if Francisco
could have slipped by the sentinels he would hard-
ly be able to obtain duplicate keys of the chests in
which the different kinds of provisions were kept.
And then stealing was the last thing of which one
would suspect Francisco.

Still, the suspicion grew. Two of the men
watched him, one day, as he and the goat passed
up the road, and noticed that the little saddle-bags
were as full as they could hold. When the pair
returned the bags were empty. The next day they
watched Francisco again, and this time they ar-
rested him.

The captain was sitting in the shade of his tent-
fly veranda, and I was within, writing at his desk,
when I heard him exclaim and rise suddenly from
his chair. Suspecting something wrong, I stepped
outside.

Guarded on each side by their captors, Francisco

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and Borinquen were coming up the company street as prisoners. Behind them walked Sergeants Petersen and Clancy—the first stolid and to all appearances indifferent, the latter with a look of real concern on his honest Irish face. Two of the three cooks followed them closely, and a little back of the cooks most of the company came hesitatingly forward and halted at a little distance from the captain's tent.

"Well, sergeant, what does this mean?" demanded the captain, tho he perfectly well knew.

"I'm afraid it looks bad, sorr," said Clancy, sorrowfully shaking his head. "These men here say that they caught the lad, here, Fran—Sanfrisco, red-handed, like, with the grub. Hitchcock! Dalton!" The two men stepped forward and told frankly, yet with evident regret, the story of Francisco's capture. It had been planned to prove his innocence rather than his guilt, one of the men explained, and, I for one, believed him readily enough. Then Borinquen was brought forward, and the hardtack, bacon, and flour that his saddlebags contained were piled at the captain's feet. There was no way in which the boy could legitimately have obtained these things. The proof against him seemed painfully complete.

"Have you anything to say, Sergeant Petersen?" asked the captain.

"No, saer," answered the Swede, saluting.

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Francisco and Bonnquen were coming up as prisoners

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"'Cept ah al-ways tank dat he was a gode boy, and ah kinda tanks so yaet."

Involuntarily lowering his voice somewhat, the captain called for Francisco. The lad, in spite of his ignorance of English, evidently understood something of what was going on. His dark skin had turned very pale, and he was trembling as he stepped up to the tent-fly and saluted.

"Francisco," said the captain gravely, "you have been found with these goods in your possession, and you are accused of stealing them. What have you to say?"

"I am no thief, señor. I am a soldier. I have stolen nothing," he replied, with a little catch in his breath. A big tear rolled slowly down his cheek, and another chased it. He started to raise his hand to wipe them away, but discipline prevailed. Bethinking himself, he dropped the hand to his side, and continued to stand at "attention."

"Where did you get that food, then?" asked the captain severely. "And to whom did you sell it?"

"I sold it to no one. And I did not steal it. I bought it. Do you think I would steal, señor? I bought it with the money I earned. The old man—the Spaniard—is now in bed, and can not rise, he is so ill. But for this food he would have starved." Francisco's voice became more and more shaky. To him the captain was the most ex-

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alted being on earth—one who must be obeyed even by the venerated first sergeant. That such a being should think that he, Francisco, could steal was too much. For a time he struggled against the tears that would come, but it was of no use. With Borinquen looking on in grave reproof, he sank in a little heap on the ground and sobbed just as tho he were a small boy, much hurt and grieved, and not a soldier at all.

"From whom did you buy this food?" asked the captain, more gently.

"That I must not say, señor. I promised not to," Francisco managed to reply. "He is ill and can not eat his rations, and therefore sells them to me. He needs medicine, he says, that the soldier-surgeon has not got, and it is for this that Honays—" Inadvertently Francisco had evidently divulged the name he had promised to keep secret, and he glanced up in dismay.

The captain looked puzzled, and translated Francisco's reply to the first sergeant.

"Honays, Honays," repeated Clancy. "No man av that name in the comp'ny, sorr."

The captain was already aware of that fact.

"I tank it might be Chones he means, saer," suggested Sergeant Petersen respectfully. "It wade be br-ronounced dat way in Spaenish."

"An' Jones it is!" ejaculated the first sergeant, as tho to himself. "Rum—the kind they makes

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around here—is the kind o' med'cine he was a-talkin' about."

"He's the third man of the cook detail. He has access to the commissary stores," observed the captain to me. Sergeant Clancy was standing like a dog that strains at its chain. The captain nodded, and he darted down the company street, entering the last tent on the right-hand side. He emerged in a moment. With one hand he led Jones by the ear, and carried in the other a bottle half full of the most malignant rum that Puerto Rico could produce.

Jones had evidently taken several large doses of his medicine. Under the captain's searching questions he hesitated, stammered, contradicted himself, and finally, in trying to mend matters, revealed enough to convict him a dozen times over. Then the captain made a little speech to Jones—a speech such as few men would care to have made to them—and then he was led away, amid the half-suppressed hooting of his comrades, to the guard-house.

The captain sat down at his field-desk and for a few minutes busied himself in making some notes for the formal charges which he intended to draw against Jones and hand in to the general court-martial then sitting. Jones had been guilty of two serious offenses: theft and bringing liquor into the camp. The captain meant that he should be

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punished for both to the full extent of the military law. The bringing of Francisco into the affair added an element of meanness to it that the captain would not forgive.

At last the captain paused and looked around the corner of his desk. "Francisco!" he said suddenly. The boy, who had not changed his position, obediently scrambled to his feet, stood at attention, and saluted. "It is not proper for a soldier to cry like that," the captain went on. "Go, eat your supper and get a good night's rest, for to-morrow you will be detailed for guard."

Francisco's face was beaming as he saluted and retired. A tour of guard duty is not regarded by most soldiers as a thing to be desired—quite the reverse, in fact; but with Francisco it was different. To him it was an honor which he had long coveted, and which was now for the first time accorded him.

"You see, there's really no further use for that sentry by the commissary tent now," the captain explained to me. "I was going to leave that post out of the detail for to-morrow; but if Francisco can get any pleasure out of that particular spot it's only fair that he should have all there is, after what he's been through to-day."

Sergeant Clancy declared that when Francisco came down the company street after leaving the captain he had grown a full inch. Francisco's

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thorough vindication pleased the sergeant—and indeed the company as a whole—almost as much as it did the boy himself. The men also sympathized with his pleasure in this new honor which had been offered him, but they did not show it. It was not their way. Instead, they began to tease him about his crying, calling him a baby, and expressing many doubts as to whether or not he had sufficient courage for a sentinel. Suppose a little girl, armed with a stick, should try to break into the store tent. What would Francisco do then? Would he have enough presence of mind, did he think, to call for the corporal of the guard?

For that night, however, Francisco's happiness was proof against all such taunts. He made no answer when they were translated to him, but busied himself in cleaning still more his already immaculate equipment until the sweet notes of "taps" sung all the men to their blankets.

The next morning, when the galloping guard-mount call blew, Francisco was the first to respond. None of the men moved with such mathematical accuracy as he. They were all neat, as the regulations require, but no buttons were so brilliant, no uniform so thoroughly brushed, no boots so well polished, and no rifle so speckless as the buttons, clothes, and cavalry carbine of Francisco.

The non-commissioned officers of the guard could

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speak no Spanish, and so I gave Francisco the special orders relating to his post. They were very simple. I said, merely, that no person whomsoever should be allowed to enter the store tent. That was careless of me; I should have said "no unauthorized person."

What followed was therefore my fault. From my tent I heard loud voices near Francisco's post. Then I heard him call for the corporal of the guard—he knew English enough to do that—and the corporal came, adding another voice to the chorus. Most of the men seemed to have an idea that Francisco could understand them if they only talked loud enough.

A moment later the corporal appeared at the door of my tent, and said that, tho he was sorry to trouble me, yet he thought I would have to go down and speak to the sentry on Post No. 8, who had "somehow got his orders mixed, sir." I went, and, breaking through a circle of grinning men, I found an indignant chief cook standing in front of a rifle held by a small boy, who sternly refused to allow "any person whomsoever" to enter the tent in order to get the bacon, beans, and flour for the dinner of the men.

There was not much trouble in straightening out the affair. I explained to Francisco what his orders should have been, and pacified the cook. After all, there was plenty of time before dinner

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need be ready. When I returned to my tent I found the captain waiting there for me.

"I'm afraid I'll have to get you to go up and see that old Spanish couple that Francisco was talking about," said he, as I came up. "I believe his story, of course, but it's only common justice that it should be verified. Take twenty men and put them in two wagons, and go on horseback yourself. That'll save time. The doctor can go in the ambulance."

"The doctor?" I repeated.

"Yes, the doctor," said the captain irritably. "You can't tell but what those people have something contagious that'll endanger the men. And take some food from our mess. They may be starving, for all you know." He almost slunk away as he finished speaking. The captain was one of those men who are always ashamed when they are caught doing a kindness for any one. And he was forever being caught.

In an army post there is little time wasted in saddling and harnessing, and in a few minutes the two wagons and the ambulance were on their way to the hacienda where we had first seen Francisco. There was no need to verify the story—it verified itself; we saw that as soon as we arrived. The old Spaniard was lying on a pile of straw—the only bed left to him—utterly helpless from rheumatism, tended by his wife, who was hardly less

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helpless than he from the terrible "*dolor de cabeza*"—the headache—that comes in that country from insufficient food, and which never leaves its victims while life remains. Francisco's gifts were all the two old people had to live upon. Even the little presents of live stock that the men had given him from time to time—chickens, ducks, and a turkey—were all there, each one neatly tethered by one leg to a peg driven in the ground in order that the creature might more easily be caught by the feeble hands of the old woman.

When we were going away I rather think the men left the old couple most of the remnants of their scanty pay. The good-natured doctor shook his head when we got outside the house.

"There's very little for me to do," said he. "I'll try and get the man into a hospital and see that they both have food, and that's about all."

What the doctor said to the captain about Francisco I did not hear, but it must have been very high praise indeed. "He couldn't say enough about what the boy did for that Spaniard and his wife," said the captain to me afterward. "You may remember that I said from the first that he was a good boy. But I didn't think there was a sneak in the company such as this man Jones has turned out to be. Well, at any rate he won't trouble us any more for some time to come."

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PART III.

WHEN the captain implied that Jones would soon be tried by court-martial and sent to prison, he was mistaken. No charges against him were ever preferred. Indeed, for a time we quite forgot him and his case, for a much more important matter took up all the mind we had to spare.

On the morning of the day that Francisco was on guard a troop of cavalry clattered up the road past our camp. They were evidently not out for horse exercise or drill, for every horse carried besides its owner the full campaign equipment. It might have been a practise march, and, languidly interested, our men watched for them to return; but they did not return. Instead, another troop followed the first. One of the troopers, in response to an inquiry from a man of our company who happened to be passing along the road, said that all available forces were to be sent against the Spaniards, who, after having surrendered the city of Ponce, had retreated and were strongly entrenched in the hills some distance inland.

The trooper passed on, and the man to whom he had spoken started on a run for the camp. In an incredibly short time every one had heard the news, and a hundred rumors, each less reliable than the one that preceded it, were chasing each other from mouth to mouth.

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Fresh bodies of troops came by in rapid succession—more cavalry, and infantry which every now and then had to scramble to the side of the road to allow the big field-guns to pass, and which cheered them as they rumbled along the smooth macadam. Then the guard was turned out for our brigade commander, who stopped at our camp for a few minutes and told our captain to hold himself in readiness to move at a moment's notice, then jingled on with his staff.

Before the general came the spirits of the men had been steadily sinking. Every one else seemed to be going to the front, and they feared that we were to be left behind. But after this visit the drooping spirits rose as tho by magic—for the time. The cheering news flew round the camp, reaching even to the guard-house, where Jones was awaiting his trial, and one or two other men were confined for minor offenses. Then the prisoners sent a message to the captain, imploring him to release them for a time, at least, in order that they might take their part in the battle which they thought was to come. Without hesitation the captain gave orders for the release of the minor prisoners; but about Jones he hesitated for some time, and finally sent for the man.

"I'm not going over again the story of what you've done," he said when Jones was brought before him, "and I don't want to hear any arguments

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or excuses. You've asked for a chance to retrieve yourself, and I've decided to give it to you. What I shall do with you later I don't know. It may depend on yourself. Now go to Sergeant Clancy and get your accouterments."

"Thank you, captain," said Jones, saluting. He hesitated a moment, and then added, "You won't regret it, sir. I'm really not so bad a man when I haven't the drink, and I'm through with that now." That Jones would drink no more was very much doubted. We had heard men say that same thing many times before. But at all events he began at once to attend to his somewhat neglected accouterments and to inquire eagerly for the latest news.

He got plenty of news, such as it was, and all of the most depressing variety, for once more the spirits of the company were ebbing. They went down all night, reaching the low-water mark at breakfast-time the next morning, when our own regiment, with shouts and chaff, went by and left us behind.

Ten minutes later a mounted orderly galloped up, handed a paper to the captain, and hurried away.

"We are ordered to escort a wagon-train that will be along here directly," said the captain to me, after reading the despatch. "I suppose there was no cavalry at hand. Sergeant, let the assembly be sounded at once, and then the general."

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The "assembly" was unnecessary; the men were already gathered. The tents came down when the "general" rang out as tho a cyclone had passed over the camp. Thanks to the warning order of the brigadier-general, there was little to do, and by the time the train appeared, a few minutes later, we were ready and waiting for it. After reporting to the quartermaster in charge, the captain disposed the men to his liking; then, with straining harness and shouting negro teamsters, the wagons creaked away up the long white road.

Along the line of men a ripple of conversation and laughter extended from the head of the train to the rear-guard, which marched many yards behind it. Francisco formed part of this rear-guard, and with him went Borinquen. When we started the goat had been tied to an axle of one of the wagons, but was immediately liberated by his master. "He can fight as well as any one," Francisco said, "and it would break his heart if he were tied up and had no chance. He is as good an American as I, and is just as anxious to drive the Spaniards out of the island." That Borinquen could fight, none of us, the first sergeant least of all, doubted for a moment. The goat himself seemed to feel that he might soon be called on to show his prowess; and, probably fearing that he might be a little rusty in this accomplishment of his, showed a decided tendency to practise on

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everybody and everything not connected with M Company that he met.

Mile after mile was slowly passed. Thru the little town of Coto, shortly to be burned by the Puerto Ricans themselves; thru the many fords and the toy-like city of Juana Diaz, we went. All along the route those natives who had not run away to hide in the mountains thronged the side of the road, offering queer, indigestible dainties to the "Americanos" as they went by.

Soon we began to pass other bodies of troops, halted and in bivouac here and there, and to exchange with them volleys of good-humored chaff. Our train carried provisions and ammunition, and therefore we were welcome in anticipation of the need for our stores.

Wagon after wagon was detached as we went, until at last but three were left. A few men were left to guard these, and the rest of the company sent on to rejoin the regiment. Among these few men was Francisco. It seemed the best method that presented itself of keeping him out of danger. I was sorry when I gave him the order to stay behind, his disappointment was so evident. Still, he was far too good a soldier to demur.

Our plans concerning this youth were, however, not carried out. When we reached the place where our regiment was camped it was very late, and the tired men dropped in their places and slept like

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logs. When we were awakened by reveille the next morning, the men who had been left behind and Francisco were among the first we saw. They had been relieved shortly after we left, and had followed us to the camp.

The regiment was greedily devouring its frugal breakfast of canned corned beef and hardtack when the distant boom of a heavy gun caused it to stop eating and listen. Then a bugle blew, so far away that we could hardly hear it, and others joined in the chorus. "Ate everything you can, me boys, an' don't lose no time about it. There's no tellin' when you'll get another chance," said Sergeant Clancy. The advice was good, and most of the men followed it; but some of them, too much excited to eat, replaced the food in their haversacks and began nervously to fumble with their equipment, putting on their belts or altering the length of their blanket-bag slings. A few minutes later the regiment fell into a long, double line beside the road, and waited, it seemed to me, for hours.

The artillery-fire increased; the distant guns, which we supposed to be those of the Spaniards, were more than answered by heavier reports, nearer, tho still distant, which we thought—rightly, as it turned out—must come from our own artillery. Leaving off the heavy packs, the regiment was started up the road, halted, moved again, and halt-

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ed once more. The artillery was nearer now, and for the first time we heard the faint popping of a desultory rifle-fire. Francisco gave a little cry of delight, and laying one hand on the arm of the man who stood next to him, with the other he pointed into the air. I looked. There was a slight puff of pearly smoke, which vanished almost instantly. Something screamed thru the air and ripped the thatch side of a native hut which stood near. Then followed a dull, muffled report. "That there was a shell," observed one of the men.

"What a bright, promisin' young man you are, Bayliss, to find that out all by yourself," said the first sergeant in reply. "You're right. It was a shell. An' you'll see more of 'em if you're lucky enough to live thru this day." The suggestion of this remark was not cheerful. In spite of himself, Bayliss shuddered a little; and then, by way of concealing it, he translated what the sergeant had said to Francisco, adding some touches of his own. Certainly I could not see that the speech caused Francisco any uneasiness. Probably he understood very little of the bad Spanish in which it was spoken, for he seemed rather amused than otherwise. Nevertheless this was the signal for all the men who stood near the boy to commence once more their old jokes about his weeping two days before. This was the only thing that they teased him about that he minded. And he certainly did

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mind this. Before long he was winking hard to keep back tears which he would rather die than to have appear. "Indeed it was not because I feared that I wept," he said pleadingly. "It was because my honor was touched, and for no other reason. You should know that."

I thought that the chaff had gone on far enough, and Sergeant Clancy evidently came to the same conclusion at the same time. "Shut up, you men," said he. "Ye're tellin' the boy here that he's a coward so's not to show the white fear ye're in yerselves. I s'pose, now, that Bayliss, that brilliant youth, will be tellin' us that the noise we're a-hearin' is the rifles of our men—most likely that Brooklyn cavalry what just went up, dismounted, an' I wouldn't wonder but what he'd add that the next turn might come our way, if he only knowed enough to think of it."

If Bayliss had "knowed enough to think of it" he would have been entirely correct. Our bugles and those of L Company brought us into column and started us up the road. As the senior officer, my captain commanded both companies, and I, therefore, was left in charge of M. The rest of the regiment, as we filed by it, greeted us with volleys of rough jokes, mainly directed at Francisco, who marched, erect and joyful, in the line of file-closers. No soldier ever went into action more gladly than did Francisco that day.

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We were hurried up the military road, past waiting wagon-trains, detachments of troops, and all the impedimenta that congregate in the rear of even a small army. In one spot, shaded and grassy, a table had been placed, and around it stood men in oil-cloth aprons who wore red crosses on their arms. Thus far these men had little to do—it was too early; but soon we met a man, here and there, limping toward them, and some helped or carried by comrades. But even without them the preparation under the trees, there, had rather a sobering effect on those who saw it. Somehow it looked so very earnest.

We were halted for a moment, and a mounted officer rode up and gave some order to the captain, who saluted, and, drawing his sword, turned toward us. A vicious hiss over our heads made us all duck. A moment later a puff of white dust flew up from the road, and we realized that it was a stray Mauser bullet that had glanced by the hard macadam and went singing away into space.

"Attention! Double time—march!" called the captain. The bugles repeated the command, and the four hundred feet pounded the road with quick beats. Another road, passing thru a valley, stopped at the farther end by steep hills and carpeted with young sugar-cane, led away at right angles from the one on which he had been traveling, and up this road we were turned. More bullets

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hissed over our heads, kicked up puffs of dust, or tore thru the cane. These were not stray bullets. A sustained fire came from somewhere at the head of the valley, but from just what point we could not tell. In spite of the officers' efforts the pace quickened until it was almost a run; yet the cadence was unbroken. One of the men gave a little scream of surprise and caught at his arm, then laughed apologetically. It was only a graze, and he never lost step.

The bullets began to fly more thickly. As he trotted along, the captain kept looking over his left shoulder at the bald, round top of a hill near the road we had left. Soon he apparently found what he sought. "Fours right! Halt! Lie down!" came the orders in quick succession. We obeyed with our bodies before our minds had time to act, and found ourselves in a ditch beside the road with the bullets hissing in harmless spite over our heads.

Here we waited. It was agonizing work, that waiting, especially for the officers, who had to walk up and down in an unconcerned sort of way to give confidence to the men. This uneasiness was not shared by Francisco. A speck of dust had insinuated itself into the breech of his rifle, and extracting a rag from his pocket, he rubbed the offending place as busily as tho he were in camp, and with as much unconcern. The only other person who did not seem to mind the bullets that were whiz-

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zing by was our captain, who stood with his field-glasses fixed on the round-topped hill. Presently a pigmy figure appeared there, bearing a red-and-white flag, which it wagged vigorously for a while from side to side, and then stopped. The captain put away his field-glasses.

"Deploy your men on the right of the road and advance," he said to me, and then left to give similar orders, relating to the other side of the road, to the commander of L Company. In a moment the bugles blew the signal to rise. The men sprang to their feet with a cheer, and, running hard, formed as skirmishers in a line which stretched across the valley, and which began slowly to sweep along its length. The bullets did not so much trouble us now. The noise made by the men as they crashed thru the cane drowned their shrill voices. One man in front of me threw up his hands, staggered, and fell. His place was instantly taken by Francisco, who scuttled between the close-growing cane-stalks as a rabbit might have done.

"Halt! Lie down!" sang the bugles once more. The cane had come to an end; beyond was open pasture-land, and we had been stopped just before we would have broken from our cover. With some trouble we could see between cane-stalks the hills which closed the end of the valley, their sides scarred by raw lines of fresh earth thrown up to

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make the Spanish trenches. On these lines of earth swarmed little brown men in uniforms of blue-and-white cotton that looked like bed-ticking. Their fire had ceased; they had lost us, and had apparently come out to see, if possible, where we were.

"Fire at will—commence firing!" said our bugles. The shadow of the cane sparkled with flashes, and the reports rattled to the hills, which threw them back at us. In an instant the bank of new earth was empty. Every man had dropped into the trenches as a prairie-dog bobs into its hole. A volley crashed from their line, but the shots flew wild. Ours did not: we could see the earth fly.

Our bugles then spoke to us again, and said several things. In obedience to their command, the firing, with a belated shot or two, stopped; the bayonets rattled as they were snapped in place; the men rose, and, trembling with suppressed excitement, trotted out across the plain. Volley after volley crashed from the trenches; here and there a man fell, and our pace quickened somewhat.

"Steady, there—steady! Keep that line dressed!" called our captain warningly. Then, as we had nearly reached the foot of the hill, he barked forth one word—"Charge!"

With a yell that drowned the reports of the rifles our two companies darted forward at top

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speed. The next moment we were clinging to the steep hillside on to which our impetus had carried us; scrambling and climbing, slipping back and dodging rolling stones, until we reached the trenches and tumbled into them. They were empty. Not a Spaniard, dead or alive, remained.

For a moment the men were silent in blank amazement; then a great roar of laughter swept down the line. It was an impulse caused, I think, by the relief they felt. A moment later there was a fresh roar as Francisco, who had been distanced in the charge, came scrambling fiercely up the hill, the hot barrel of his rifle clutched tightly in one little brown hand. The laughter did not last long. A volley, well meant but badly directed, rang from a coffee-plantation higher on the hill, sending our men out of the trenches as quickly as the Spaniards had dropped into them. The enemy had not retreated far.

"Lie down! Drop!" roared our captain as soon as the men had cleared the bank of earth in front of the trench. The company officers echoed him, and most of the men obeyed, snuggling themselves under the shelter of the earthwork. Some of the younger soldiers had reached the bottom of the hill, and had to climb up again.

The firing, which had been high, lowered until a haze of dust hung over the top of the bank, kicked up by the bullets that lodged there. Then it slack-

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ened somewhat. "No firing!" called our captain to the other officers. "You don't know where the enemy is. Wait till we locate him." He climbed to the top of the bank, unbuckling the case of his field-glasses. Suddenly he stumbled and lurched forward, throwing up one hand in a vain attempt to regain his balance. Two of the prostrate figures lying under the bank rose and darted forward to assist him. One of them grasped at his upraised hand. A ragged chorus of shots rang out from the plantation; the man straightened, then collapsed, and all three fell heavily into the trench.

It was all over in an instant. I was too far away to assist. All I could do was to give the enemy something to think about in hope that no more shots would be fired at the three until we could get them in. I frantically shrieked the order to commence firing from the magazines, and the commander of L Company, tho my superior, repeated it.

Never was an order obeyed more promptly. Practised hands pumped the repeating-rifles; the shots sounded like the roll of a drum, and the young coffee-trees bent and swayed as tho a wind tossed their branches. Such a fire could last only for a moment, but before it had time to slacken a shell flew screaming among the coffee-trees and burst there, and an echoing roar came from one of the side hills. Then I knew that the artillery

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had come up, and as far as we were concerned the battle was over.

A dozen men jumped on to the embankment in time to see the captain rise to his feet, and then, with a groan, sit down again. "I'm not hit," he said. "I fell, and I think I've sprained my ankle. Somebody lift out these men. I'm afraid they're hurt. Why, that's Francisco!"

It was indeed Francisco, lying face downward in a huddled heap on the body of a soldier—his rifle still grasped in his hand. The first sergeant stooped and tenderly lifted him; then stood looking at the man who lay at his feet. The boy's body had concealed the lifeless face of Jones.

"Heaven rest him," said Sergeant Clauey, "for he died like a man!"

"It's only a scratch on the thigh," said the surgeon, when he had carried Francisco to the place under the trees where he had elected to do his work. "It's only a scratch on the thigh. I suppose the fall stunned him; but I'm much mistaken, captain, if he isn't walking about on that leg of his before you can use your ankle. He'll come to in a minute. He's coming to now."

As the doctor spoke Francisco opened his eyes, and they happened to fall upon me. "I hope that now the men will no longer think me a coward; Señor el Teniente," said he. "I tried to behave as a soldier should. I wish always to do that."

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I certainly did not think Francisco a coward, and had never thought so; but before I could answer him the captain spoke.

"If you would learn to be a good soldier, Francisco, you should go to the United States, and to school, and there learn to speak English, and many other things besides. Would you like to?"

"Señor," answered Francisco, "save that it would prevent my going, I would die for it."

"Then you shall go," said the captain. With a smile of the utmost beatitude, Francisco turned away his head and, closing his eyes, lay still.

"Did you really mean that?" asked the surgeon, looking up, amused, from the bandage he was wrapping around the captain's ankle. The surgeon was not as busy as we feared he would be when we saw him before the battle.

"Of course I mean it," replied the captain somewhat testily, for his ankle hurt him. "Didn't you hear me say so? When the regiment's ordered home that boy shall go with it."

And he kept his word.

San Francisco a coward,
before I could an-

and soldier, Fran-
cisco States, and to
English, and many
like to?"

"save that it
lie for it."

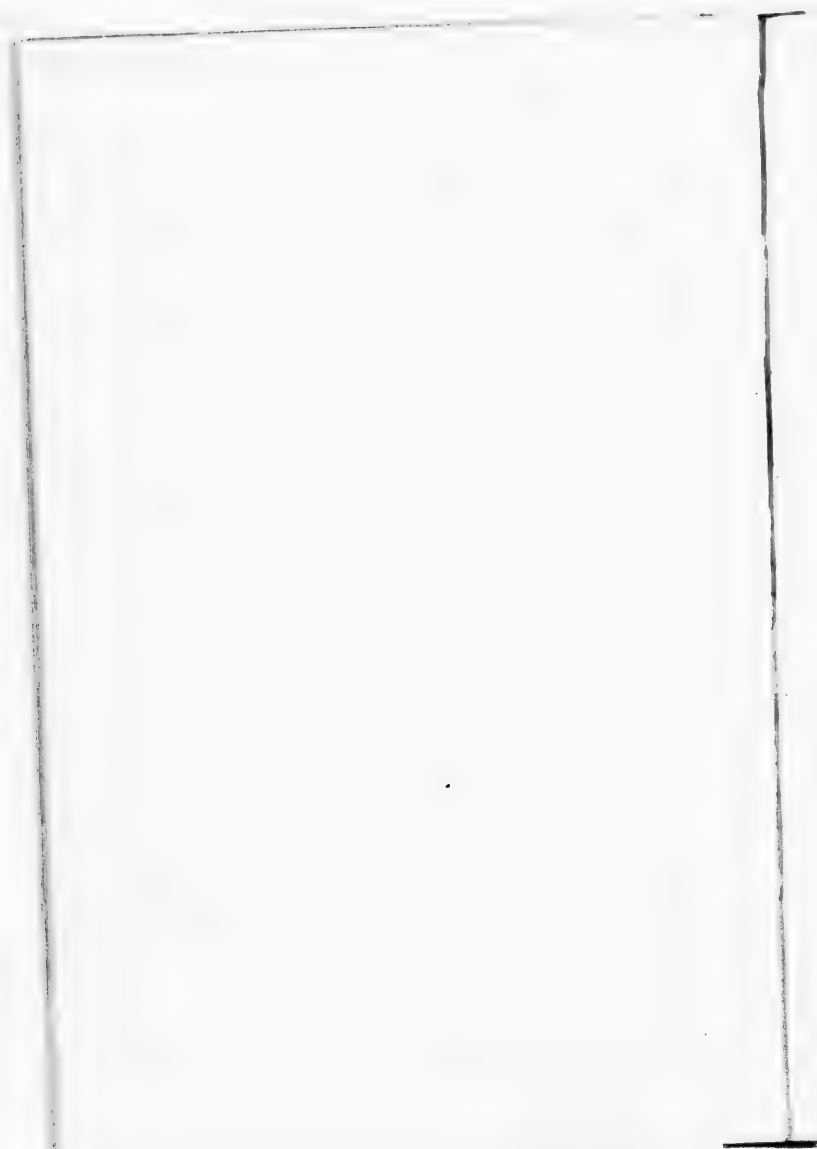
captain. With a
San Francisco turned
up, lay still.

asked the sur-
geon the bandage he
put on his ankle. The
surgeon said he would be
back.

The captain some-
times. "Didn't you
regiment's ordered

The Taper

By
Count Leo Tolstoy



THE TAPER*

It was in the time of the lords. There were different kinds of lords. There were those who did not forget that there is a God, that some day they must die; and these did no wrong to men. There were others who were dogs—may God have mercy on them! But there were no worse chiefs than the old serfs come up out of the mud and become chiefs in their turn. These, above all, made the life of the poor people hard.

In a certain manor there was a certain manager. The peasants did their tasks. The lands were extensive and good, and there were water-courses, fields, and forests. There should have been enough for everybody, the manor, and its muzhiks. But the proprietor had chosen a manager from among the domestics of one of his other estates.

This manager at once assumed all authority, and pressed with all his weight on the backs of the muzhiks. He had a family—a wife and two married daughters—and had already amassed consid-

* Translated from the French by Kate Rohrer Cain.

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erable money. He should have been able to live, and to live without wrong-doing; but he was insatiable, and already hardened in evil. He began by setting unreasonable tasks for the muzhiks. He had a brick-yard made, and made everybody work for him, men and women. Then he sold the bricks for his profit. The muzhiks went to Moscow to complain to the lord, but nothing was done about it. The lord sent them back, and let the manager do as he pleased. The latter found out that the muzhiks had made a complaint, and he wanted revenge. The life of the peasants became harder than ever. Among them were false brethren who denounced their comrades and strove to injure one another. The people were uneasy, and the manager's anger increased.

As time went on, things grew worse. They began to hate the manager as a wild beast. When he went into town, people shunned him as they would a wolf, hiding, no matter where, to get out of his sight. The manager perceived this, and the fear he inspired irritated him the more.

In time such monsters are always cut off. The muzhiks gathered together often in some corner, and the boldest would say: "Shall we longer endure our oppressor? To be the death of such a creature is no sin."

One day, before Holy Week, they held a meeting in the woods, where the manager had sent

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them to trim the trees. The time drew near when they might eat and feel at ease.

"How to exist now," they said, "is the question. He oppresses us grievously. We are harassed. There is no rest, day or night, for us or our wives. And even now he is not satisfied. And the lash! Simeon is dead under the lash. Anissim perished in the stocks. What are we waiting for? He will come again this evening, and persecute us merely for his pleasure. We have only to pull him off his horse and give him a blow of the ax, and that is enough. We'll bury him like a dog, and the water will flow over him. Only let us understand one another well. All hold firm. There must be no disloyalty!"

Thus spoke Wassili Minaer. He was more set against the manager than the rest. The oppressor whipped Wassili every week, and he had taken Wassili's wife to be his cook.

So the muzhiks plotted till he arrived. Soon he appeared on horseback, and began to find fault with the workmen because they had not cut the trees as he wanted them. Among the heap of cut branches he discovered a little linden.

"I didn't order the lindens cut!" cried he. "Who did it? Own up, or I'll whip every one of you!"

Then he tried to find to what row the cut linden belonged. Gidor was denounced as the culprit.

THE TAPER

The manager bruised his face till the blood came. Then he did the same thing to Wassili on the pretext that his heap was not big enough; and then he left.

In the evening the peasants reassembled, and Wassili spoke:

"See here, all of you. You are not men, but sparrows. We'll settle his account for him, you say; and when the time comes you back out. Just like a lot of sparrows against a sparrow-hawk. 'No cowardice, no disloyalty!' And when he comes nobody breathes. And then the sparrow-hawk seizes what he wants and bears it off. Who's missing? Ivan. So much the worse, it's all right. Just like you. When he was doing up Gidor that was the time to set upon him and finish him. But you! 'No cowardice, no defection!' And when he came, everybody bent his head."

The faultfinding became more and more frequent, and the muzhiks swore to get rid of the manager. He gave out work during the holidays. This order irritated the peasants extremely. They assembled at Wassili's house in Passion Week, and again deliberated.

"If he has forgotten God," they said, "we ought to kill him for good. We ourselves shall die if we don't do it."

Pierre Mikheer came also. He was a timid man, was Pierre Mikheer, and he did not like to

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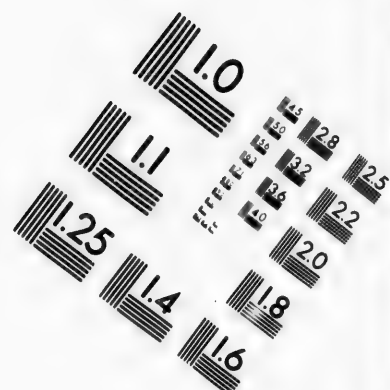
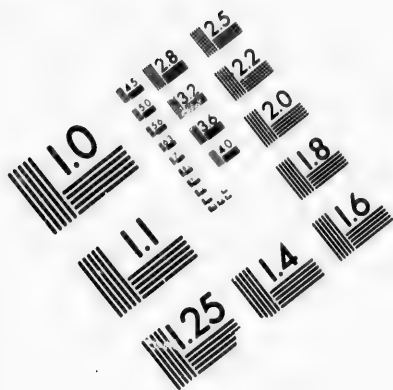
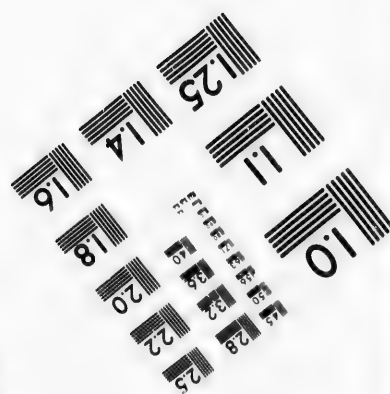
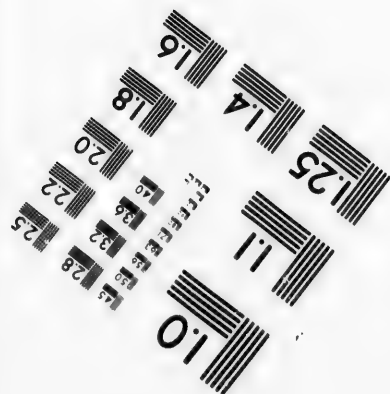
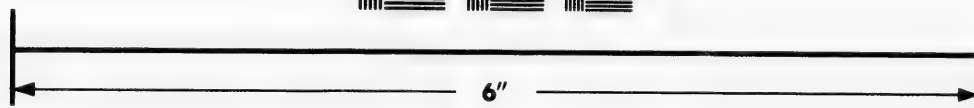
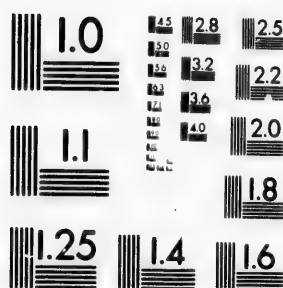


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THE TAPER

mix in discussions. He came, nevertheless, and said: "What you think of, my brothers, is a great sin. To lose one's own soul is a serious thing. It is easy to lose the soul of another; but how shall he find it himself? Does he do wrong? The wrong remains with him. It must be borne, my brethren."

At these words, Wassili became angry.

"He goes over the same thing, always, this fellow, that it is a sin to kill a man! Of course, but what man? It is a crime to kill a good one; but such a dog! Even God wishes it. You have to kill mad dogs if you have any pity on men. It would be a greater sin not to kill him. How many more men will he make suffer if he is let alone! And for us, if we have to pay for his death, we shall suffer for others, and they will be grateful to us. You talk nonsense, Mikheer. Will it be less a sin to work during Easter than to kill him? You are not going to work, are you?"

Mikheer answered: "And why not? If I am sent I shall work. It is not for myself that I work, and God will know whose is the sin. Only we must not forget. It is not I who speak thus, my brethren. If it were said that evil should be combated with evil, God would have proclaimed it; but the contrary is laid down. He that taketh the sword shall perish with the sword. To kill a

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man is an easy thing; but the blood will stain your soul. To kill a man is to dye your soul with blood. You think to put evil out of the way by killing a wicked man. You will charge your conscience with a greater evil. Endure the misfortune, and you vanquish it."

After this the muzhiks took no resolution. Counsel was divided. Some thought with Wasili; the others ranged themselves on the side of Pierre, to commit no sin, and endure. The first day, Sunday, the manager let the peasants observe the fête. But the starost [a representative of the peasants named by themselves] came in the evening, and said: "Mikhaïl Simenovitch, the manager, orders that everybody go to work to-morrow."

The starost went thru all the village, announcing the work for the morrow, assigning the fields on the other side of the river to some, and those along the highway to others. The muzhiks wept, but they dared not disobey.

The next day they got out their plows and went to work. The church bells rang for mass, and everybody kept the fête but the muzhiks. They worked.

Mikhaïl Simenovitch, the manager, rose late and made a tour of the fields. His wife and his widowed daughter dressed themselves, and went to mass. They returned, and a servant prepared the

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samovar. Mikhail Simenovitch returned also, and they all sat down to take tea. After tea, the manager lit his pipe, and had the starost called.

"Well, have you put the muzhiks to work?"

"Yes, Mikhail Simenovitch."

"Is everybody there?"

"Everybody is there. I led them myself."

"Keep at it! Keep at it! Do they work? Go see, and tell them I'll be there after dinner. They must do a measure of double rows, and do it well. If I find bad work, I'll not promise what will happen."

"Yes, they understand."

The starost was about to leave, when Mikhail Simenovitch called him back. He wanted to say something more, but felt embarrassed about saying it. He did not know just how to begin.

Finally it came out, "Listen well," he said, "to what these rascals say of me. Find out who threaten, and what they say. Report all to me. I know them, the rascals. They don't want to work. They would like to stay in bed all the time, and do nothing. To eat and make merry—that's what they would like. Then, listen to their chatter, and bring it all to me. I must know. Go along, now, and hide nothing on me."

The starost left, and went to the fields toward the muzhiks. The manager's wife had heard the conversation between the starost and her husband.

THE TAPER

She was a gentle woman, with a good heart. When she could, she calmed her husband and took the part of the peasants with him.

Now she approached near to her husband, and made a request.

"My dear Michenka," she pleaded, "for the great day, for the sake of the fête of Our Lord, do not sin, and, in the name of Christ, do not make the muzhiks work."

But Mikhaïl took no heed of his wife's words, and laughed in her face. "Is it then so long since the switch promenaded over your shoulders that you have become so bold? This is none of your business."

"Michenka, my dear, I have had a dream about you,—a bad dream. Listen to me. Don't make the muzhiks work."

"It may be that you are too fat, and you think the cat-o'-nine tails will not lash. Take care! take care!"

He was angry, was Simenovitch. He thrust his lighted pipe almost into his wife's mouth, and sent her away, ordering her to have dinner served.

Mikhaïl Simenovitch ate stew, and pie, *chtchi an poré* [a kind of soup made of cabbage and beets], pig roasted in milk, a soup of meat and milk. He drank cherry brandy, and ended with a sweet cake. Then he called the cook, and ordered her to sing, while he accompanied her on the guitar.

THE TAPER

Thus gayly did Mikhail Simenovitch pass the time, twanging his guitar and idling with the cook. Presently the starost entered, saluted, and made his report. "Well," asked the manager, "do they work? Will they get through their task?"

"They are already half done."

"Is it well done?"

"Yes, I saw nothing wrong. They are afraid."

"Does the ground open up well?"

"Yes, very well. It powders up like poppy seed."

The manager was silent a moment. "And what do they say about me?" he asked. "Do they abuse me?"

The starost seemed embarrassed. But Mikhail Simenovitch ordered him to speak the whole truth. "Don't be afraid. They are not your words you speak, but theirs. If you tell the truth, I will reward you; if you conceal anything, I will whip you. Here, Ketucha! Give him a glass of brandy to brace him up."

The cook brought the brandy to the starost. He offered a toast, drank the contents of the glass, and wiped his beard. "No matter," thought he; "no matter if they don't speak well of him; I'll tell him the truth if he wants it." So he began:

"They complain, Mikhail Simenovitch, they complain."

THE TAPER

"But what do they say? Speak out!"

"They say that *he* does not believe in God."

The manager burst out laughing.

"Who said that?"

"Everybody. They say, moreover, that *he* has dealings with the devil."

The manager fairly split his sides laughing.

"That's good. But tell me in detail. Who talks like that? What does Wassili say?"

The starost did not like to speak ill of his comrades; but for a long time there had been a misunderstanding between him and Wassili.

"Wassili bawls louder than the rest."

"But what does he say? Speak out!"

"I am afraid to repeat it. He says that *he* will not escape the death of the impenitent."

"Ah, bravo! Very well, then, why does he wait and not kill me, then? Are his arms too short? Very well for you, Wassili, you'll get your settlement. And Tichka, the dog, also. What does he say?"

"Everybody speaks evil."

"But what do they say?"

"It is wrong to repeat it."

"What's wrong? Have courage. Speak!"

"But they say: May *his* belly burst and all his entrails come out."

Mikhail Simenovitch then became very merry indeed.

THE TAPER

"We'll see whose entrails come out first. Who was it said that? Tichka?"

"But nobody speaks well; all speak ill, and threaten."

"Very well; and Pierre Mikheer. What does he say? He curses me too, I hope?"

"No, Miknaïl Simenovitch, Pierre does not curse."

"And what does he do?"

"He is the only one of them all who says nothing. He is stranger. I have looked at him with much surprise, Mikhaïl Simenovitch."

"And why?"

"All the muzhiks are astonished at his conduct."

"But what does he do?"

"It is something altogether extraordinary. As I approached he was working on a measure across near the Tourkine. I drew near him, and I heard him singing in a voice so sweet, so pleasant! And something was burning on his plow."

"Well?"

"It burned like a little fire. I went close, and I saw a five-kopek taper stuck in his plow. The taper burned, and the wind did not put it out. And he, in a new shirt, worked and sang psalms. Tho he turned and moved his plow, the taper did not go out. He shook it before me, and changed the share, and still the taper did not go out."

"And what did he say?"

THE TAPER

"Nothing. Only, when he saw me, he wished me the joy of the season, and went on singing."

"Did you talk with him?"

"No. But the muzhiks came up, and they laughed. 'Look there,' they said; 'Mikheer can never pray enough for the pardon of his work in Holy Week.'"

"And what did he answer?"

"Only one thing: 'Peace on earth to men of good will!' He drew his plow, called to his horse, and went on singing. And the taper burned all the time."

.
The manager did not laugh any more. He let go his guitar, dropped his head on his breast, and remained buried in thought.

For some time he remained thus absorbed. Then he dismissed the cook and the starost, passed behind the screen, threw himself on his bed, and sighed and groaned like the passing of a hay-wagon.

His wife drew near, wishing to comfort him. He did not answer her, but only said: "He has conquered me."

"What!" said she. "You have done many other things and you never had this fear. Why are you afraid now?"

"I am lost," he replied; "he has overcome me."

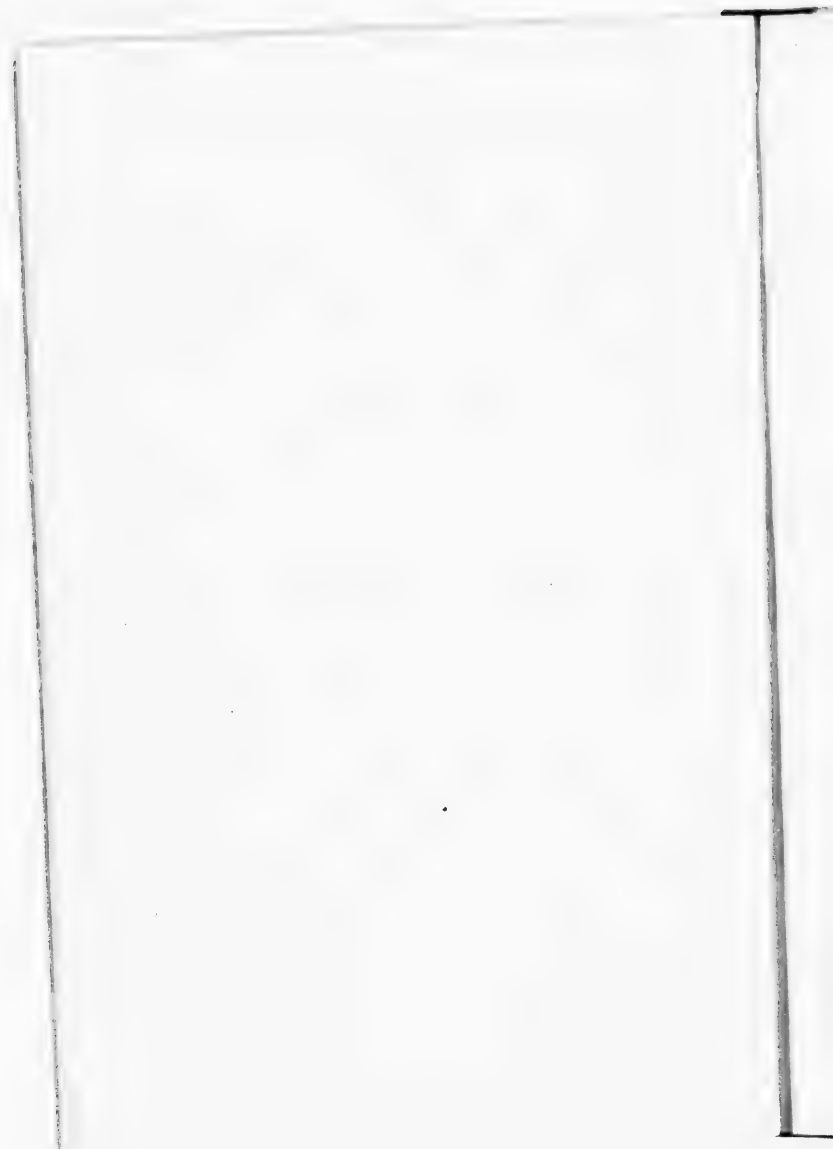
THE TAPER

Go away, I haven't killed you. This is nothing to you." And he did not rise.

The next day, however, he got up and undertook to live as before; but it was not the same Mikhail Simenovitch. It seemed he had a presentiment of something. He drooped, and hardly went out at all. He did not rule much longer. The lord came soon, and asked for him. "The manager is sick," it was reported. The next day he was still sick. The lord learned that he drank, and then he took the management away from him.

Then Mikhail Simenovitch did nothing, fretted more, became dirty, drank everything he had, and fell so low that he stole his wife's clothes and took them to the drinking-house. The muzhiks themselves pitied him and gave him to drink.

At the end of a year he died, killed by drink.

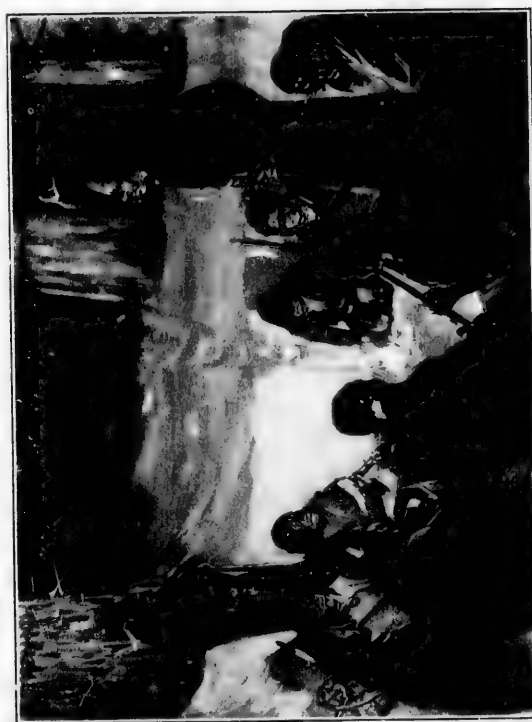


**How Viardeau Obeyed
the Black Abbé**

**By
Charles G. D. Roberts**

**Illustrations
By
E. W. Deming**

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The council fire.



The council fire.

HOW VIARDEAU OBEYED THE BLACK ABBÉ

THE time was night, of the 23d of December, 1754. The place was a spruce-forest in old Acadie, or—as its new masters, the English, had rechristened it—Nova Scotia.

The encampment was in the deep snow of the Acadian winter. Nowhere else did the straight trunks of the ancient spruce and fir trees shoot up so gigantically as here. In the fitful red illumination of the camp-fire they cast goblin shadows upon the band of Micmacs, painted savages squatting on their haunches about the blaze. Standing very erect, near the fire, was the spare figure of La Garne, "The Black Abbé," bane of the English, terror of the Acadians, shame of the church, but idol of his savage flock, the Micmacs of the Shubenacadie.

The ruddy light, falling upon his face as he gazed into the fire, intensified the harsh and bitter lines of the wide, thin mouth and indomitable jaw; made more grotesque than fate had planned it the

HOW VIARDEAU OBEYED

long, bulb-tipped nose; deepened with abrupt shadows the frown of his high, narrow forehead; and lit a cruel red spark in the gleam of his close-set eyes. Over his coarse, furred leggings and stout coat of Acadian homespun, he wore the black soutane of that priestly office which he dishonored.

A few steps back of the half-circle of squatting and grunting savages stood Jean Viardeau, leaning against a tree, both upturned hands clasped over the muzzle of his musket. A short but athletic figure, very broad in the shoulders, with stiff black curls crowding irrepressibly from under the edge of his blue woolen toque, he would have been handsome but for the settled cloud of anger on his face. He was a man with a grudge. Vengeance upon the English was his one thought; and when vengeance delayed, resentment deepened. There had been, he thought, too much delay in this camp among the fir-woods.

There was no wind. The flame and smoke went straight up, toward that far, black hole in the forest roof where through two great stars sparkled icily. A few feet from the main fire was a heap of glowing coals, raked forth for convenience in the cooking; and from the unctuous sputter of the broiling bear's meat came a savor of richness somewhat rank.

Suddenly the dark form by the fire turned, and strode over to the young Acadian's side. Viardeau

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THE BLACK ABBÉ

looked up, and a flash of expectancy lightened the gloom of his square-jawed face.

"Work for me to do?" he asked eagerly.

"Work for you!" answered the priest, shutting his thin lips, and pausing to eye the young man with an atomizing scrutiny before unfolding his purpose.

"I know, my son," he went on in a moment or two, "both your love for France and your righteous hatred of the English. We,—I, and you, and a few—alas, too few!—faithful and resolute like ourselves—are the instruments of vengeance on the enemies of our country. You, unlike myself, have a personal grudge against them, I believe!"

The young man's eyes flashed, and he opened his mouth to speak; but La Garne continued:

"I think they robbed you of your little patrimony. I think, too, your father fell by an English sword, by the banks of the Tantramar. But that was years ago, when you were too young to remember!"

"I remember it as if it had been yesterday! I remember my mother's tears!" exclaimed Viardeau fiercely.

"It was long ago," went on the Black Abbé, "and it was in fair fight. But of late, I think, the English have been kind to you. Is it not so? This can not but ease your bitterness against them in some measure!"

HOW VIARDEAU OBEYED

But none knew better than La Garne the freshness of Jean Viardeau's injuries, his new rage born as it were yesterday.

"Curse them!" he muttered between clenched teeth. "They have robbed me of my last hope, the stay of my mother's age. My hand is against their name and race, while I have strength to lift it up!"

"Why, my son, what is this new injury? As if you had not suffered enough from the usurper's violence!" said La Garne softly, with a sympathetic wonder in his voice.

"Did you not hear of it, father?" exclaimed Viardeau, husky with the vehemence of his hate. "They seized my schooner, the *Belle Marie*, with all her cargo of barley, flax, and fish bound for Louisburg; confiscated them, sold them in Halifax. And there was a fortune for me in that cargo, had I got it safe to Louisburg. We escaped with but the stuff on our backs,—Louis, Tamin, and I!"

"Then where are Louis and Tamin?" asked the Black Abbé.

"Oh," cried Jean with angry scorn, "back at Grand Pré,—smoking, smoking, talking, talking, and watching the pot on the fire. They are tame. They are not men. But I—I will strike back!"

"You shall strike at once, and strike hard, my son!" said the Black Abbé.

"How?—When?"

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THE BLACK ABBÉ

"To-night, when you have eaten," continued La Garne, "you shall take one of my faithful followers here, and meat enough in your pack for three days' journey, and set out for the Nappan. You know the little marsh where the Des Rochers brook flows in. On the upland bordering the marsh on the south an English settler has built his cabin. He has cleared fields. He has dyked in part of the marsh. He is prospering. Soon other English will come and do likewise, setting a greedy grasp upon the lands of our people. They must be discouraged. Terror must seize the souls of any that would follow them. You must get there to-morrow night, Jean. Not one of them must see the next daybreak. The cabin must be smoke and ashes under the next sun. The lesson must be one to be read far off. If these robbers will not spare our lands for justice, they shall for fear."

"Will we two be enough for the fight, father?" asked Viardeau.

"There will be no fight, my son," answered La Garne coolly. "There is but one Englishman; and he will be asleep. It is simple. And I have work elsewhere for the rest of these!"

"I should like a fair fight!" murmured the young man doubtfully. "I would see his eyes. I would strike him down, and he should know my vengeance. I like not stabbing in the dark!"

"So,—it is not only Tamin and Louis," said La

HOW VIARDEAU OBEYED

Garne with a slow sneer, "who can 'talk, talk,' and 'sit by the fire,' and fear to strike. It is enough, Jean Viardeau; you Acadians are not men. I have my savages. I will send Sacobi and Big Paul. They are men! They——"

"You speak in haste, Father La Garne!" broke in Viardeau hotly. "I will not be talked to so. And I will go. I meant to go from the first, if you had no fighting for me to do. I could do you better service in fighting; and your redskins could perhaps do better at stabbing in the dark. But I go. Give me Sacobi. He's got more brains than the rest, and talks French."

Taking no notice whatever of the young man's anger, the Black Abbé coolly summoned Sacobi from his place beside the broiling bear's meat, and proceeded to give orders for the conduct of the enterprise. Half an hour later Viardeau and his redskin companion, slipping their moccasined toes under the moose-hide thongs of their snow-shoes, turned their backs on the camp-fire and the smells of broiled bear's meat, and struck off into the moon-mottled shadows and clean balsamy savors of the forest.

Sacobi was a lean, active savage, a head taller than the Acadian, but of slimmer build. Shrewd, quick-witted, less reticently monosyllabic than his fellows, and at ease in the French tongue, Viardeau regarded him as the one Indian fit to hold

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THE BLACK ABBÉ

speech with. There was little speech between them, however, on that night march. There was occupation enough for thought and sense in picking their path through the misleading shadows. When they had marched perhaps three hours, and the moon had sunk so low as to be no longer of use to them, they halted, dug a roomy hole in the snow with the snow-shoes, built a fire in the center of the cleared space, and bivouacked for the night.

Viardeau was restless, and little in love with his undertaking. Hence it came that he slept ill. He was not one to set his hand to the plow and look back, however ugly might seem to him the furrow he was doomed to turn. But he wanted the business done quickly. Before dawn he had aroused his indifferent comrade, and with the first flood of rose-pink staining the eastern faces of the fir-trees, the two were again under way. The snow was firmly packed, the snow-shoeing easy; and Viardeau's bitter impatience brought them out too soon upon the edge of the marsh by the Nappan water.

It was a little after sunset, and the winter night was beginning to close in. The channel of the Nappan, at half tide and choked with muddy ice-cakes, groaned in shadow. But the open clearing beside them, with its blackened stumps upthrust through mounds and curling drifts of snow, caught the last of the daylight. Across this dying pallor came a cheery yellow radiance from the windows

HOW VIARDEAU OBEYED

of the settler's cabin, set close for shelter under the forest-edge at the north side of the clearing. Flanked by its wide-eaved log-barn and lean-to shed, it made a homely picture in the wilderness; and Viardeau's scowl deepened.

"Three—four hours, may be," said the Indian, "before they sleep yonder!"

"Why not tackle him now, and give him a chance in fair fight?" growled the Acadian, fingering his musket impatiently.

"No fair fight now!" retorted Sacobi. "Him inside. See us plain. We no see him! All on one side!"

Viardeau could not but acknowledge the force of this; and he knew the nice marksmanship of the English settlers.

"Bien, Sacobi," he assented reluctantly, "I guess that's so, all right. And there's only the two of us, so we can't throw ourselves away. But I tell you there's got to be a fair fight. When we get the blaze going we'll wake him up and let him come out to take his chance. No knifing in the dark for me!"

The Indian looked faintly surprised at this sentiment; but being a brave man, assented willingly enough. As long as the command of the Black Abbé was carried out he was content that Viardeau, whom he admired, should be suited in the manner of it.

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THE BLACK ABBÉ

Cautiously Viardeau led the way around the skirts of the clearing, and into the dense growth of mixed young and old timber which almost touched the roofs upon the north. From this post of vantage they could survey the situation and lay their deadly plans. They commanded a view of the front of the cabin, and of a beaten trail running down the gentle slope from the doorway to a narrow opening in the opposite woods. A very bright light shone down the trail from the cabin windows.

"That must be the trail to Des Rochers village," whispered Viardeau.

The savage grunted assent; and then muttered:

"Why make so great light?"

"It is the eve of Noël, you know!" answered the Acadian with some surprise. "*Christmas Eve* the English call it; and it is a great festival with them, even more than with us!"

"See candles, many candles, in window!" went on the savage, still puzzled.

"Ah, somebody is expected!" replied Viardeau, at once growing more interested. "Somebody more to fight! A good fight, maybe, after all! Eh, my Sacobi?"

"Good fight, no fight,—all same to me, so long as job done and Black Father satisfied," said the Indian with a large indifference.

Just then the door opened, and a woman stood

HOW VIARDEAU OBEYED

in the doorway, peering anxiously down the trail. Framed with the light as she was, and her face therefore enshadowed, her features could in no way be distinguished. But the form was that of a slender girl.

At this sight Viardeau growled an impatient curse. His companion understood it.

"No prisoners!" he grunted. "No time for prisoners! *That's* less trouble!"

And he made a significant gesture at his scalp-lock.

Viardeau started.

"No!" said he, in a tone of icy conclusiveness, "none of that, my friend! There will be a prisoner. I will have no murder of women or children!"

The savage looked at him askance. There were unknown quantities in this Acadian which his less complex brain had not yet estimated. But he was an astute savage, and saw nothing to be profited by argument. It was clear, however, to him that Viardeau was angry at finding there was a woman to be reckoned with. Presently he saw Viardeau smile. How could his wrath vanish so rapidly? Sacobi could not grasp the quick workings of his companion's mind. It had occurred to Viardeau that to save the woman's life would in some degree compensate for the treachery of the business to which La Garne and his own vindictiveness had committed him.

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THE BLACK ABBÉ

While he was revolving this thought, and deriving much satisfaction therefrom, he was fairly startled by a sound from across the clearing. A piercing and piteous scream, a child's scream of mortal terror and despair, thrilled through the evening quietude. Jean Viardeau instinctively sprang forward clutching his musket.

At the foot of the slope, where the Des Rochers trail emerged from the woods, came into view the small figure of a child, running for life.

In a second it came into the line of light. It was a little boy. His sturdy legs were all too short for the speed required of them. In one mittened fist he frantically clutched the handle of a small wooden bucket. His light curls streamed out behind his shoulders, from under his woolen cap. And now Viardeau saw his little round face, the eyes, wide with awful fear and hopeless appeal fixed upon the lighted windows of home.

At the sight of that childish agony, Jean Viardeau's heart came uncomfortably into his throat. He had never been at ease when he saw a child suffer.

"What can have scared the tot?" he murmured to himself.

But even as he asked it, he was answered.

Out from the darkness of the trail came a wolf, galloping low, muzzle down, tongue lolling from the fangs. And after him two more, close upon the leader's gaunt flanks.

HOW VIARDEAU OBEYED

Viardeau dared not fire. The child was in a line between his musket and the wolves. But he did not pause to weigh the consistency of his action. His throat aching with pity, he dashed down the slope, shouting to the child that he would save him.

Upon the hope of help the little fellow's strength all at once gave way. His knees failed him, and he fell headlong, face in the snow; and Viardeau groaned.

But at that great shout the wolves paused, wavered an instant. It was but an instant, and they sprang again to the attack, seeing a single foe before them. But that instant was enough. Viardeau was already between them and their quarry.

Before they could leap upon him he fired, and one sank kicking on the snow. The fangs of the next were fairly at his throat, ere his long knife, driven upward with a tremendous short-arm stroke, went through the mad beast's gullet and reached the brain. But the heavy onrush at the same moment all but overbalanced him; and in the wrench to keep his feet he swung violently aside, still clinging to the knife-hilt where it stuck fast in his adversary's neck.

That swing probably saved Viardeau; for the leap of the third wolf fell short. Its jaws clashed like a trap, but merely plowed a furrow in the flesh of his shoulder, and gained no damaging grip.

THE BLACK ABBÉ

In the same second the brute caught sight of the long form of Sacobi, loping down to the rescue; and wheeling with a fierce snarl, it fled for the woods. Before it had gone ten paces the Indian's musket crashed, and the lean gray body, stretching on the gallop, suddenly doubled up into a shuddering heap of fur.

"Well done, my brother!" panted Viardeau, shaking himself like a dog just from the water. Then he ran to pick up the boy, who still lay face downward, shaking and sobbing.

"There, there! Don't be scared, sonny, they're all killed!" he said gently in English, lifting the poor little figure. But at the sound of the kind voice the sobs broke into violent crying. The child clung convulsively to his neck, and hid his face in the comforting homespun bosom.

"There, there, I'll take you home," he went on soothingly, all-forgetful of his grim errand.

"Oh, thank God you were in time! God bless you! God *will* bless you,—sir!" exclaimed a choking voice at his elbow.

He turned, somewhat embarrassed by the clinging arms, and saw the young girl who had stood in the doorway. She was trembling so that she could scarcely stand up; and her face was ashen white. The light from the door, which stood wide open, shone full upon her; and for all her pallor Viardeau's first thought was that never before had he

HOW VIARDEAU OBEYED

seen such a face. Smooth, heavy masses of fair hair, ruddy in the candle light, were drawn low to either side of a very broad, low forehead, and half covered the small ears. The eyes, astonishingly large, and now wide with agitation, were set far apart, and seemed to Viardeau like pools of liquid darkness. The short upper lip and short, upturned chin made Viardeau think, even in that moment, of an old Venetian coin which he had taken in the way of trade one day at Louisburg, and for its beauty had kept by him ever since.

Jean Viardeau was more disturbed than he had been by the wolves.

"It was nothing, miss—they were only wolves!" he stammered. "Shall I carry the little fellow up to the house for you?" And he started up the lighted slope with his burden.

All the time, however, he kept a sidelong gaze upon the girl who walked at his side.

"Oh," she cried again, in a poignant voice, pressing her hands to her eyes as if she would shut out a vision of horror. "If you had not come! If you had not come in time!"

Then she reached out her arms to the child. "Come to me, Boysie! Come to me!" she entreated.

But the boy clung the tighter to Viardeau's neck. And the young Acadian glowed with an absurd warmth of satisfaction at the preference.

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THE BLACK ABBÉ

"How did I let him go so far alone, and so late?" she went on, reproaching herself, with no tears, but hard, choking sobs. "And the wolves. Father always said there were *no* wolves in Nova Scotia!"

"The hard winter, the deep snow so early, that's driven them in, from over the Neck, miss!" spoke Viardeau.

By this they were come to the house. Silently the Indian stalked in after them, seated himself by the great open fire, and gazed into it with unwinking eyes. The child had by this time recovered himself somewhat, and stood upon his feet, releasing Viardeau from the solid burden of a sturdy lad of eight. But he kept close to his protector's side, and shivered if the latter moved a foot's length away from him. Playing with a rude wooden doll, near the hearth, sat a little flax-haired girl of five or six. Looking up, she smiled indulgently upon the visitors. Then her look changed to one of deep concern. Jumping to her feet, she ran over to Viardeau and seized his hand.

"Poor man! Poor man!" she cried earnestly. "Oh, what bit you? Oh, the blood!"

Bewildered by his emotions, and by the events which had brought him as a trusted protector into the household which he was sent to destroy, Jean Viardeau had not noticed his wound; but now he awoke to the burning throb of it. Instantly the

HOW VIARDEAU OBEYED

tall girl was at his side, her eyes brimming with tears of self-reproach.

"All I've thought of has been Boysie and myself!" she cried. "Forgive me. Sit here, sir. I must dress it for you! Oh, but your poor shoulder is so badly torn! *Please sit down!*"

But Viardeau was now wide awake. He saw for the first time in all its hideousness the work which had been set him. He shook at the thought of it.

"No, miss," he answered, growing white about the lips. "It is nothing. We have far to go. We must go at once!" And firmly he unclasped the child's fingers from the flap of his woolen capote.

The girl's level brows went up in wonder and displeasure.

"*You can not go, sir, till I dress your wound!*" And gently, but with a certain positive authority, she pushed him toward a settle. "*You can not go till we have supper. You can not go till my father comes, to thank you for saving the life of his only son. When father comes, he will keep you, to help us celebrate this happy Christmas, which but for you——*" and with a passionate gesture she covered her eyes again, nor trusted herself to say what would have been but for him.

Viardeau felt that the wound—a tearing gash—should be dressed. And her fingers were very soft

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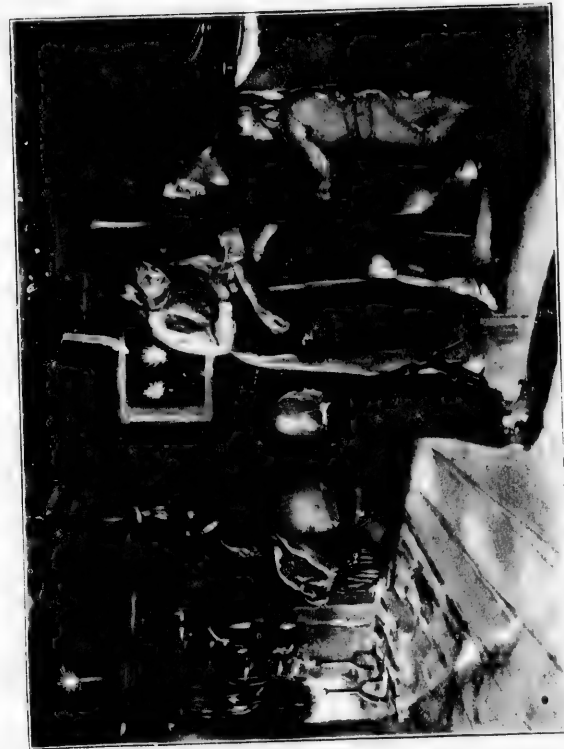
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Her fingers were very soft and cool.

THE BLACK ABBÉ

and cool to the angry flesh. He looked at Sacobi; but the savage sat like a statue, gazing into the fire. The young man yielded. He would go right afterward.

At this moment the steps of a heavy runner came up to the door. The door was dashed open. A big, ruddy man, light-haired, gray-eyed, frank of countenance, carrying a heavy pack, burst in. The pack fell by the door with a thud, and he sprang across the room to crush the boy to his heart. His father instinct had told him the situation at once. Then he held out his hand to Viardeau.

"God reward you, stranger!" he exclaimed in a deep voice that thrilled with fervor. "I see a bit of what's happened. I heerd the shots. I seen the carcasses out there. And I reckon you've saved for me what's more'n my life! Now, tell me all about it, Marjy, my girl!"—and he stopped, panting, and hugely out of breath.

"It was nothing! It was all in the way of a day's hunt!" interposed Viardeau hastily.

But the girl Marjory, breaking in indignantly, told the story as it was; and the boy, forsaking his father, emphasized it by running to cling again to Viardeau's side.

The big man's eyes were wet. He came and wrung Viardeau's hand once more.

"I"—he stopped with a gulp,—"I see jest how

HOW VIARDEAU OBEYED

it was!" he cried. "You can't *thank* a man that's done what you've done for me this night, stranger. But—but—if ever you want a friend, why, I'm John Brant,—and I'd give my right hand for you, —I'd—Marjy, my girl, make haste now and get supper. We're all hungry, I reckon! Eh, sissy?" And to hide his emotion he snatched up the little girl with her wooden doll, and began careering boisterously up and down the room.

After a minute or two of this he quieted down.

"I say, stranger, it was God Himself that sent you, I allow," said he. "But where in thunder did you come from, so in the nicest of time?"

Jean Viardeau could stand it no longer. This gratitude, trust, devotion, were crushing him to the ground. He arose, and putting out his left hand in nervousness, he ungrasped the child's arm and held it tight, consciously, while he spoke.

"John Brant," said he, "stop this gratitude. I will not eat of your bread. I will leave this roof as soon as I have spoken. I do not deserve that you should bear to look upon me. Where did I come from? Not from God. From the devil! I came to murder. I was sent to destroy this house, and all in it!"

"Well! I'll be——" gasped the big man, sitting down and staring, while anger, astonishment, and a sort of sick horror chased each other over his broad face.

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THE BLACK ABBÉ

Now Sacobi, as it chanced, understood English, tho he could not speak it. At the first of Viardeau's passionate speech he had turned, his eyes ablaze with scorn. As the young man went on, the Indian slipped noiselessly toward the door. No one heeded him. Over the big Englishman's shoulder Viardeau saw him open the door and vanish into the night. He had no wish to hinder that flight. He went on with his self-denunciation.

"Before morning this house would have been ashes, you a dead man, your children captives—had I done what I was sent to do!" concluded Viardeau, dropping his head, not daring to meet the look which he felt must be in Marjory Brant's eyes.

There was a silence when he stopped—a silence that seemed to overtop and bear him down. Then he saw the girl had come to his side—was standing close by him.

"You didn't know!" she said softly. "You came to bring us death; but you brought us life, and shed your own blood for a stranger child."

"Right you are, Marjy, my girl!" exclaimed the big man, springing up to yet once more wring the hand that had saved his son. "Cheer up, man! Don't look so down! Your heart's in the right place. What care I for all you *thought* you was goin' to do? You're the man in all the world

THE BLACK ABBÉ

for *me*, that's what. You've given me my boy. Come, come, supper, my girl! Shall we starve on Christmas eve? Where's your Injin?"

"He didn't see it just as I did," answered Viardeau. "He's gone!"

"Best place for him!" said John Brant heartily.

"He'd have been dreadfully in the way for Christmas!" said Marjory, laughing into Viardeau's eyes.

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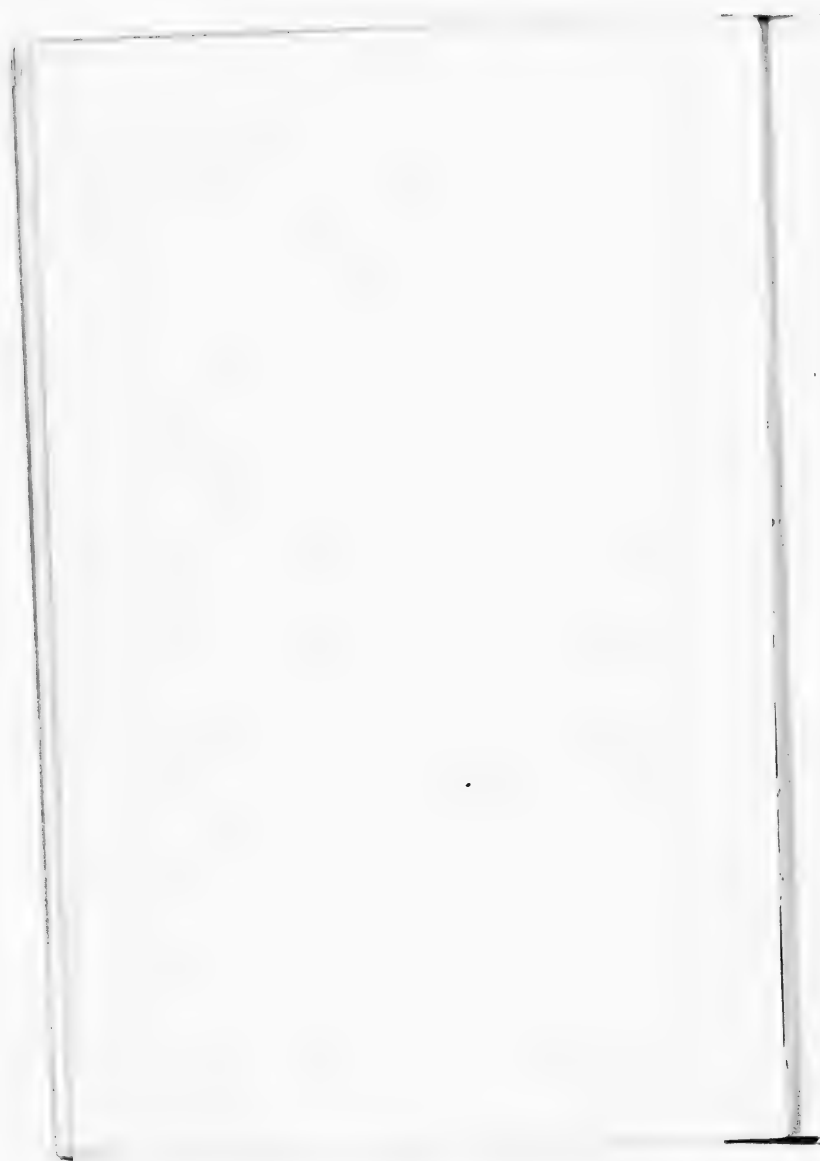
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**John Merrill's Experiment
in Palmistry**

**By
Florence M. Kingsley**

**Illustrations
By
Florence Carlyle**



JOHN MERRILL'S EXPERIMENT IN PALMISTRY

JOHN MERRILL sat in his sanctum, his desk piled high with letters, manuscripts, proof-sheets, and other material necessary to the production of *The Weekly Protest*, a journal devoted to the best interests of mankind in general, and in particular to the extermination of machine politics, corner saloons, and breweries.

In spite of its unpopular aims, however, *The Protest* was a popular sheet, for it boasted in the person of its editor a genuine humorist. John Merrill always saw the ludicrous side of everything, and this tendency of his crept into his would-be solemn editorials, and peeped out on every page, so that even in the saloons one might see a group of men laughing over the latest edition of *The Protest*, which tickled their sense of humor, while it belabored their bottles and barrels with no tender hand.

On the occasion of which I speak, the editor had just finished a particularly telling editorial.

JOHN MERRILL'S EXPERIMENT

"That'll fetch 'em," he remarked to himself with a chuckle, as he wrote the last line with a flourish. "It doesn't leave *The Daily Scratcher* a leg to stand on nor a foot to scratch with. If Simpkins only knew enough to appreciate the fact that he was properly rubbed down; but, for hopeless idiocy well mixed with asinine obtuseness, recommend me to Simpkins of *The Scratcher*. Hallo, what's wanted?"—this last to the office boy.

"A—a—somebody to see you, sir."

"Show 'em in, show 'em in," said John Merrill briskly; "and give this copy to Thatcher."

The next minute he was staring at a small figure, which looked as tho it might have strayed out from the open pages of a fairy book. The office boy, who had lingered to observe the effect of the visitor, retired, doubled up with an irrepressible fit of the giggles.

"Oh, I say now, who are you?" said John Merrill.

The newcomer—a diminutive black boy, attired in a costume of scarlet and purple, gorgeous to look upon—performed an obeisance suggestive of the most profound respect, and presented a large white envelope. A strange, spicy perfume floated out from the sheet as the editor slowly unfolded it.

"Honored and Revered Sir," he began; "'I kiss the hem of your distinguished garment'—What the deuce?—'I have the sublime pleasure

RIMENT

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IN PALMISTRY

had of what you call advertise in your *Protest*,
once, twice, three times, for my great, grand, won-
derful art of palmistry. I now crave also a boon,
honored sir, to read what Fate has engraved upon
your palm. Do me therefore the distinguished
honor to come to my salon, and I freely read for
you past things and things darkly hid by the veil
of the future, yet clear and plain to my eyes as if
writ on paper. The slave will conduct you, should
you condescend to heed my prayer. With my
forehead in the dust, distinguished savant, I kiss
your feet, as becometh your base servant, Palmad,
son of Thutmes.'

"Tra-la-la!" said John Merrill, when he had
finished reading his epistle, "I'll go! Here you,
minion of Palmad, conduct me, I command thee,
to the presence of thy lord. And no monkey-
shines by the way, or I bowstring thee."

The boy displayed a mouthful of shining ivories,
his great black eyes rolling in the lawless fashion
peculiar to his race; then he winked rapidly and
shook his head.

"I perceive that you do not understand the Eng-
lish language, my young friend," said the editor
thoughtfully, as he glanced at his watch, "so I
will merely request that you get a 'hustle on'; for
I must be back within an hour."

The boy started off at such a tremendous pace
that John Merrill had great ado to keep up with

JOHN MERRILL'S EXPERIMENT

him as he darted in and out through the crowd. He managed, however, to keep his eye pinned to the active red turban, which presently came to a standstill before a flight of steps, leading up to one of those dubious edifices once fashionable residences, but long since abandoned to the stealthy upward trend of business. Following his guide up the winding staircase, the adventurous editor of *The Protest* found himself before a door, on which was inscribed in letters of gold, half a foot long, "Pal-mad, the Seer."

This door, which swung open at the boy's knock, revealed an interior so strange and fantastic that the visitor found himself walking softly, hat in hand. The subdued light from a pair of heavily draped windows shone through a haze of aromatic smoke, stealing upward in light wreaths from a censer swung before an image of the sleeping Buddha; about the neck of the god reposed a garland of lotus blooms, apparently fresh gathered. The walls were covered with Eastern draperies, and further adorned with groups of strange weapons and bits of barbaric pottery, in fantastic shapes and colorings. Chairs there were none, but luxurious divans against the wall were heaped high with parti-colored cushions. John Merrill paused in front of the image of Buddha, and looked about him somewhat impatiently. "So far, good—and good as a circus; but where is the chief performer?"

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IN PALMISTRY

Then being quite unabashed after his prolonged survey, he raised his voice and shouted, "Palmad, son of Thutmes, come forth!"

Immediately the heavy curtains which concealed one end of the room parted, and the figure of a man, tall, slender, and sinuous, clad in the snowy robes and turban of an Oriental, came slowly down the room. This individual ran his quick black eye over the stalwart figure before him, then, bowing himself almost to the ground, he seized his visitor's ungloved hand and looked at it earnestly. "Thou hast had hardships in the past," he murmured, in perfectly good English; "but thou hast before thee a great, a wonderful destiny."

John stared hard at the man; as usual he had a strong desire to laugh, but the seriousness, not to say solemnity, of the face before him was so great that he forebore.

"This glorious line of thy fate," continued the wizard, knitting his gloomy brows, "is crossed by other lines in so strange a manner that—but come into my inner shrine, where the light of heaven will shine more clearly on the mystic hieroglyphs of thy palm."

At the end of an hour the editor of *The Protest* might have been seen rapidly making his way down the street. "Confound it!" he muttered, glancing at his watch, "I've wasted too much time on that fellow." Then he threw back his head and laughed

JOHN MERRILL'S EXPERIMENT

aloud. "Best joke on Molly!—Let's see, not happily married, he said, or at least not *suitably* married. Won't she laugh when she hears that?"

"I say, George," he remarked an hour afterward to one of his coadjutors of *The Protest*, "I went to see that palmist fellow; he sent for me this morning—offered to read my hand *gratis*."

"Did he send that little monkey in red and gold after you?" queried George, languidly twisting his mustache with a very grimy hand.

"Yes, that little black imp—did you see him? Well, he is a sample of the whole show. It's the greatest show on earth, admittance ten dollars, at the usual rates. He told me a lot of stuff—and, by Jove, some of it was pretty straight! Said I might make a great hit inside of five years, and sail up like a rocket. But the best joke was that he declared I had not married the right girl!"

"He was off there," commenced George, laughing uproariously. "What will Mrs. Merrill think of that? I say, she'd better go and see what he'll tell her."

"Catch her spending a tenner on that sort of thing," said Merrill proudly; "she's got too much sense. I had a good mind to tell the fellow that I'd been in love with my wife since I was in breeches, but I didn't—didn't say a word; just looked sort of sad, and sighed a trifle. That led him on, and he enlarged upon the subject in a way

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IN PALMISTRY

that came near earning him a licking then and there."

That night when the editor of *The Protest* got home, he found his two daughters thumping out a duet on the piano. They stopped long enough to inform him that "Mama was out—downtown," they thought, then resumed their duet, which was only interrupted with an occasional brisk quarrel for the next half hour.

The dinner-bell rang, and Mrs. Merrill was still missing. John waited five—ten minutes; then, in a decidedly grumpy frame of mind, ordered the meal to be served at once.

"When a man comes home tired and hungry he ought to find his wife ready to welcome him with a good dinner," he thought to himself as he began to carve the mutton, which, unluckily, was quite tough.

"I'll have a different cook when I get along a little further," he continued, his mind half unconsciously reverting to the glorious prophecies of the wizard. Then certain other words of that worthy recurred to his mind. "Your unfortunate marriage may possibly counteract this line of fame; it crosses it in such a way as to leave us in some doubt——"

At this particular point in his meditations the front door opened, and in another moment Mrs. Merrill, fresh and glowing from the cold air, en-

JOHN MERRILL'S EXPERIMENT

tered the dining-room. "Oh, John," she began, laughing, "I had the funniest time——" Then alarmed at the severe look with which he regarded her, she broke off to say, "Why, what is the matter with you—are you sick?"

"Sick? No!" exclaimed the editor, frowning. "But hang it all, Molly, this mutton's tougher than tripe. That cook of yours wants watching."

Mrs. Merrill drew off her gloves with a very sober face. "I don't know that it is Bridget's fault," she said quietly; "the butcher is growing careless; perhaps you had better speak to him." Then she turned to her daughters, who had been looking on in grieved astonishment.

"I've something pretty for each of you," she said brightly. "You shall see after dinner."

Not to dwell on a very disagreeable subject, I am obliged to confess that altho John Merrill never ceased to scorn himself for so doing, and declared to himself a thousand times a day that it was all rank nonsense, the words of Palmad, son of Thutmes, stealthily burned themselves deeper and deeper into his heart, as evil words are sadly prone to do. From the genial, open-hearted, fun-loving companion that his family and friends had known in the past, he became little by little, morose, introspective, and unable to laugh.

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ERIMENT

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IN PALMISTRY

the men in *The Protest* office, with blank faces.
"He's getting to be more of a faultfinder than old
Simpkins."

"What's the matter with *The Protest*? It's
falling off," said the subscribers; and they too
fell off by dozens.

"What *can* be the trouble with John?" wailed
Mrs. Merrill, the tears, once strangers to those
bright eyes, brimming quite over and running
down her cheeks. In vain she wore all her pret-
tiest gowns, and cooked with her own hands the
dainty dishes that John loved.

"I don't know why," that gentleman thought
gloomily to himself, on one of these occasions of
dismal failure; "but it does annoy me so to see
Mary fidgeting and fussing to please me, that I
can't help being disagreeable."

"Mary is a good woman," he said to himself, a
month later; "but I am afraid that we are sadly
mismatched." By which it will be seen that the
descent to Avernus had become very easy, and was
growing proportionately swift.

To the fact, which was duly pointed out to him,
that *The Protest* subscription-list was dwindling
sadly, he paid very little heed. Indeed, he had
simply said, "Confound *The Protest*!" whereat
his informant, George Benton, had stared, and
gone sadly away to his desk. On a dark evening
in December, John Merrill found himself next to

JOHN MERRILL'S EXPERIMENT

Simpkins, the editor of *The Daily Scratcher*, in the elevated train.

Simpkins nodded fraternally, then buried himself in the pages of his own paper. "Great note about that palmist fellow," he remarked presently, looking up. "It seems he was not the right one."

"What did you say?" said John Merrill, rousing himself at the words.

"Why that fellow, Palmad, who's been making such a to-do—you interviewed him, so did we—has been arrested for getting money under false pretenses."

"What's that?"

"The great and only Palmad has just arrived, with great blowing of trumpets; the first one's a fraud. He's an American, named Jonas Smart, who caught on to the advance ads. of the great and only, rigged himself up with all the stage properties required, and skimmed the cream off the pan, while the other fellow was on his way from Bagdad, or India, or some other outlandish place."

"And he knows nothing about palmistry?"

"Not a blamed thing—if there's anything to know. Made it up as he went along. Big joke on a few people I know of!" And Simpkins laughed unpleasantly. "Going to get out here?"

"Yes, I forgot something important. Good-night."

Once out of that train, John Merrill proceeded

EXPERIMENT

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IN PALMISTRY

—as he afterward confessed—to kick himself around one block no fewer than eight times; after which, feeling somewhat soothed, he dashed into a florist's establishment and recklessly invested his last five dollars in a big box of roses. Then he ran every step of the way for the ten blocks which separated him from a certain snug house in Harlem.

Mrs. Merrill was at home and alone—John made sure of that before he went in. Her face looked white and worn in the light of the big lamp, which shone on the heaped-up garments which she was patiently trying to "make do" for one more season.

At the sight John Merrill deliberately batted his head against the wall and groaned. "Insufferable duffer that I am!" he ejaculated; then unable to bear his thoughts longer, he burst in upon the astonished little woman.

"Molly," he cried, "hooray! Molly, you're the dearest little woman in the world, and I'm the biggest donkey in the world! It's another case of Titania and Bottom! Molly, do you *hate* me?" He knelt down at her feet, and the small woman called Molly totally disappeared in a profusion of overcoat, big arms, and whiskers. When she emerged a moment later, tearful and rosy, she asked solemnly, "John, are you sure you aren't coming down with grippe?"

"Grippe? thunder, no!" roared John, "but I

JOHN MERRILL'S EXPERIMENT

reckon I've had it. *Molly, hooray!*" And he tore the cover off the box and emptied five dozen big red roses into her lap, completely smothering the things which were being "made to do."

Mrs. Merrill doesn't know to this day what ailed her husband. As for the men in *The Protest* office, they shortly forgot all about it, after the fashion of men. The subscribers forgot it too. Indeed, they very soon denied with indignation that they had ever said one derogatory word about the paper. As for the new subscribers—and their name was legion—they were too busy laughing over the capital fun, mixed with capital good sense, with which its pages sparkled, to say more than this—the best of all good advertising, as every editor knows: "If you haven't read the last *Protest*, my dear fellow, you've missed it!"

When, early in the new year, a small, sleek, dapper, well-dressed and smiling individual, presented himself in the office of this prominent sheet, to learn why his business card had not been printed in a late issue of the paper, he was both grieved and astonished at the reception he received in the sanctum of the editor.

"No, sir!" thundered John Merrill, in his deepest bass. "I don't believe in palmistry; it's all rot, sir, devilish rot! I won't have the word printed in my paper! Good morning, sir."

Whereat the small, sleek, dapper, well-dressed

EXPERIMENT

"Pray!" And he emptied five dozen completely smothering made to do."

This day what ailed *The Protest* office, after the fashion of it too. Indeed, indignation that they heard about the paper. And their name was hanging over the capital sense, with which than this—the best editor knows: "If best, my dear fellow,

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IN PALMISTRY

individual, who was indeed no less a person than the distinguished Palmad, late of London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Vienna, and the world at large, went away. He was not smiling as he went, but at the distance of half a block from the office of *The Protest* he was seen to shrug his shoulders. "Dese Americaine," he murmured tranquilly, "aire singulaire—ver' singulaire!"

**The Strange Case of
Esther Atkins**

**By
Mrs. L. E. L. Hardenbrook**

**Illustrations
By
J. R. Connor**

THE STRANGE CASE OF ESTHER ATKINS

WHEN Mrs. Atkins, after ten years of married life, became a widow, she with her only child Esther settled in a plain New England village, in whose outskirts she owned a pretty cottage designed as a summer home. As years passed by, Esther became to her daughter, sister, comrade, lover, friend—all in one. Their mutual sympathy and devotion far exceeded mere parental and filial regard. Esther's character developed a stronger individuality than her mother possessed, and their relations were nearly reversed. Their secluded life was marked by deepening harmony, not marred even when an affection natural to Esther's age culminated in her betrothal to Archibald Erksine.

Contrary to the rule of the usual, this event was ardently desired and promoted by the mother. The young man was remotely connected with her family. He was of steadfast integrity, good mental endowments, and amiable nature. An acquaint-

THE STRANGE CASE OF

ance, begun in childhood, ripened into sincere if not over-romantic affection, and their engagement was sanctioned on his last visit, during the vacation of the Western College where he was preparing for the ministry.

Esther Atkins, tho of good physique, was not robust. In the spring of her nineteenth year, when returning from a walk to the village, she was overtaken by a sudden rain-storm. Reaching home chilled and wet, she lingered to read letters just received from her lover. During the night she was awakened by a congestive chill, the commencement of a severe attack of pneumonia. In spite of medical care, three days later Esther Atkins lay dead in the desolated home.

The night before her death, when all hope had been abandoned, the stricken mother knelt by Esther's bedside, silent and tearless in her despair. The dying girl, suddenly roused from the stupor in which she had lain, opened her glittering eyes, and placed one feeble arm about her mother's neck.

"Little Mither," she said earnestly, using a playful pet name adopted from some verses called 'Mither and Me,'—"oh, do not believe me capable of deserting you! It is not possible, dear. I could not prove so base, so faithless to all our life has been. In *some way* I shall achieve my purpose, tho I seem to go. I can not, *will* not

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ESTHER ATKINS

leave you until the end. Remember, oh! remem-
ber, I will be by you to the end—yes! to your
life's end!"

This she repeated again and again in weakening
tones. Then, babbling the refrain of the rimes
ending

"Nobody else, only Mither and me"—

her eyes closed, and she spoke no more.

A fortnight before this event took place, a fam-
ily named Warner had moved into the village.
They occupied a large gray stone house on the
farther side of the small stream that meandered
picturesquely through the place, and whose rustic
bridges and a mill-site constituted pleasing fea-
tures in the rural landscape.

Mr. and Mrs. Warner had inherited this home-
stead, and had now taken possession, bringing
their daughter Elizabeth with them. They were
strangers, and beyond the inevitable tradespeople,
had met none of their neighbors. Elizabeth had
made several visits to the small shops where house-
hold necessities were to be procured.

The first time she entered a fancy store, the
woman in it advanced with a familiar smile, say-
ing, "Good morning," adding: "What can I show
you, Miss Atkins?"

Elizabeth replied with some haughtiness in her

THE STRANGE CASE OF

contralto voice, "I am not Miss Atkins, but I would like some carpet thread and large needles, if you please." The woman stared. "Yes, miss; excuse me, miss. I hear you are not, but I could not have believed it, if you had not spoken."

Elizabeth felt the woman's eyes follow her in mute bewilderment while she made her purchases.

On her way homeward, some boys and two women said "Good day" as she passed by. She thought it country courtesy, till one small urchin added "Miss Atkins," and she was slightly annoyed. Then she recalled greetings in church, and how several persons lingered and stared when she joined her parents.

Elizabeth Warner told her mother of these repeated experiences, and they were curious to see "Bessie's double," as they called the unknown Miss Atkins.

Elizabeth Warner was returning from the post-office one day. Just as she passed over the bridge nearest the ivy-clad church, the mellow bell began to toll. She stopped to count. Nineteen strokes only. She sighed. That was her own age. It must be sad to die at nineteen.

She retraced her steps. A man was clearing rubbish from the front of the churchyard.

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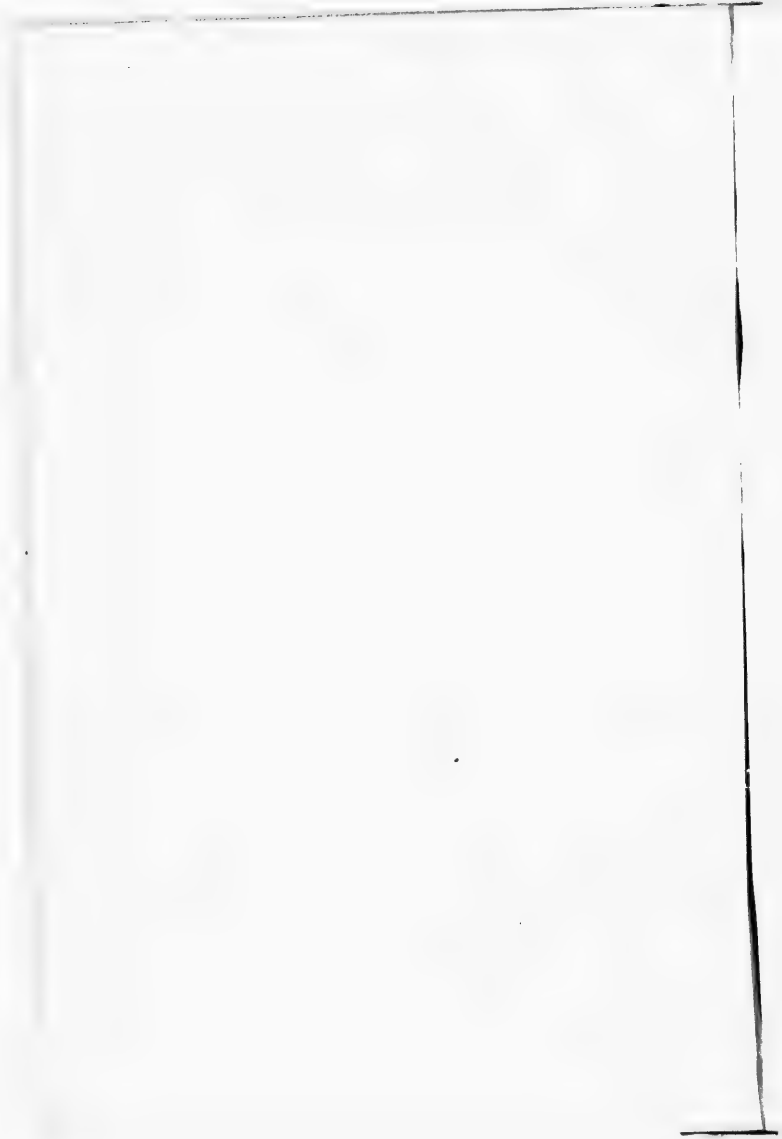
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ESTHER ATKINS

"A sweet young lady, miss," he answered before looking up. When he did so, he stared.

"Ah! she might be your twin sister, miss. And only three days sick."

"And her name?"

Elizabeth felt it before he said: "Miss Esther Atkins; and sure she must have been some kin to ye," he muttered.

"Thank you." Miss Warner walked home slowly.

"Mother," said Elizabeth that evening, "I heard that Miss Atkins died to-day—the girl, you know, who looked like me. Would it be a proper thing for me to go to her house? I want to see her. They lived in that white, neat-looking cottage at the turn of the shady lane we like so much. She had no one but her mother. May I go? Indeed, I feel that I must."

"Why, Bessie dear," replied the placid Mrs. Warner, "I can see no reason why you should not. They would certainly have called soon. In a place like this it would show our neighborly sympathy. Take some lilies. An only daughter, and just your age, did you say? I am sorry for her mother. I must go and see her some day."

Mrs. Warner took up her work-basket, and as she put her needles away she debated in her mind what sort of preserves Mr. Warner would prefer for tea.

THE STRANGE CASE OF

The next day Elizabeth went to the cottage, her heart full of a vague sadness, and her hands full of pale flowers. She met some women on the same sad errand, and asked to join them. She had veiled her face from an instinct of delicacy to conceal a resemblance that might be painful. As she stood by the dead girl's bier and laid the garlands at her feet, looking long and stedfastly at the face so like her own, she could easily perceive the resemblance. A picture she had of herself with downcast eyes was more like Esther than like herself. There was the very arch of the brow, the droop of the mouth, the wave of the brown hair. She noted the lobes of the ears, unpierced like her own; touched her hands, placing some lilies-of-the-valley in the fingers. They were tapering and shapely like her own.

Elizabeth stood spellbound. Great waves of pitying tenderness swept over her, a yearning regret that she had not known her, had not been able to love or serve her—a cry from a sisterless soul for a joy unrealized, a need never known till now.

She stooped impulsively, kissed Esther's cold face, and departed.

The day following she sat among the people in the church and stood beside the open grave of the young girl so early called away. Elizabeth had

ESTHER ATKINS

never before met Death in such a form that it appealed to her personally. She felt, in a subconscious way, that tho for Esther it was the end, for *her* it was a starting-point: there were new-born emotions and desires, crude and imperfect, but yet real, surging in her soul.

Elizabeth could never recall the days that followed this burial. She was absorbed by a vague disquiet, a sense of impending crisis that rendered her usual life unusual. Her parents considered her in low spirits, depressed by the change of residence, associates, and occupations, affected naturally by being confronted on the very threshold of a new life by this spectacle of death arresting one young and closely resembling herself.

They waited for Time to remove these sad impressions.

Late in the afternoon of the ninth day after Esther Atkins's funeral, Mr. and Mrs. Warner returned from a long drive. Bessie was not at home. On her mother's dressing-table lay a sheet of paper. On it Elizabeth had written:

DEAR MOTHER:—I feel as if I *must* go and comfort Mrs. Atkins. If I should not come home to-night don't be frightened. I shall be perfectly safe.

With love,

BESSIE.

Mr. and Mrs. Warner talked during the evening

THE STRANGE CASE OF

of their daughter's loving nature, and were only slightly disquieted when at bedtime Bessie had not returned.

As in a dream, Elizabeth Warner sped along the road that led to Mrs. Atkins's cottage. She was impelled; she did not go—she was taken.

Passing the churchyard, she caught sight of a black-robed figure; it was that of Esther's mother. She did not stop; the house was her destination. Her mind held but one purpose—to reach the cottage. She opened the gate, entered, and went up the pathway. A dog came to meet her, and fawned upon her; she patted his rough head fearlessly. As she reached the door she *remembered* where the key was always hidden—in a window-shutter—got it, unlocked the door, replaced the key, sprang the latch, and went upstairs to a room. She knew it, but it looked so prim and formal. She was drowsy; she sat down for a moment and nodded.

Oh, this would never do! She must sleep! In an instant her hat was off, her wrap, her dress hung up. She caught a dressing-gown from the closet, put it on, and sank down upon the bed. Sleep overcame her at once.

The sun shone cheerily through the white-curtained window, lighting the room where Elizabeth

ESTHER ATKINS

Warner had slept long and deeply. It was Esther Atkins who awakened and looked drowsily about her familiar bedroom. "How well I feel!" ran her thoughts. "They were mistaken in fancying me so ill. I will get up and surprise mother."

She rose softly, so as to disturb no one, and began to dress. Her hair looked odd, but she quickly arranged it in her usual way. When she went to her closet for a dress she noticed some strange articles of clothing: "These must belong to some nurse mother has had for me," she thought, and she hung them out of sight. She put on a blue morning-dress, knotted a ribbon at her throat; her gown as well as her shoes seemed loose. "I have lost flesh—and how pale my hands are!" she thought. She said her morning prayer and went downstairs.

In the small breakfast-room Mrs. Atkins sat, her Bible on her knees. Esther's step was heard, then her voice, humming the lines of a familiar hymn.

The door opened.

"Good morning, dearest Mither," said the girl. "I have come down to breakfast with you. I awoke feeling so strong I wanted to surprise you." And she came closer, bent over and kissed the astounded lady. Mrs. Atkins looked in her face, gasped, and almost lost consciousness. Esther put her arms around her.

THE STRANGE CASE OF

"Oh, dearest, I did not mean to startle you so!" she said. "Did you think I was not able to get up yet? Dr. Manly was wrong to frighten you about my chill. I knew it was not serious. He just wanted to make a bill as big as when you were ill last winter. We must try Dr. Selden and his little sugar pills, next time. Come, everything will get cold. Let me pour you a cup of tea."

"Esther, Esther, my child! Oh, it can not be you, alive, well again, after all I have suffered! Have I been dreaming, or am I mad!" cried the distracted mother.

"You look as if *you* had been ill, instead of me, precious little Mither," said the girl, soothing and caressing her. "You have been over-anxious; but now all will be well again, and I shall begin at once to nurse you. Oh! I must let Rollo in for a minute, he is begging and scratching so hard at the door."

A moment after, she and the overjoyed house-dog were romping together in all the freedom of long and familiar friendship.

In a waking dream, Mrs. Atkins gazed upon them. Had Esther's death been the fearful vision of a diseased brain? This was Esther's form, wearing Esther's garb, Esther's voice speaking Esther's love, using Esther's household phrases. What did it all mean? Then for a moment Mrs. Atkins fancied *she* had died in her turn, and was

ESTHER ATKINS

meeting Esther in their "own place" beyond the dark valley.

With sudden self-surrender she regained partial composure, rose, and embraced Esther, saying she was quite well, only faint from fasting. They sat down, and ate their simple breakfast together.

Mrs. Atkins furtively regarded the girl opposite her. It was, and yet was not, the same Esther she had borne, nurtured, loved, and, as she supposed, buried. If a ghost, she was not ghostly. A spirit had not warm, fleshly identity, a varying bloom, and an interest in every-day homely topics, a healthy relish for plain cottage fare.

She fancied she could detect slight differences of feature only appreciable to a mother's eye. When the face before her was in repose, when the girl raised her eyes, and they and her lips smiled, there was no doubt possible. Be the solution what it might, at least these moments should be prolonged and rapturously enjoyed. If God had been so merciful and tender in His loving-kindness as to restore her one well-beloved wee lamb, she would accept her with thanksgiving at His hands. They went together into the sitting-room, and Esther, as was their custom, read aloud the lesson and psalms for the day.

There seemed a plaintive pathos in her voice, as she read the verse: "He came unto His own, and

THE STRANGE CASE OF

His own received Him not." After that, they fell into sweet converse.

It would be untrue not to admit that, despite her acceptance of the gift, the mother was adroitly applying test after test to her restored daughter. She talked of the past, the future, the present—all was alike familiar to the girl. Esther, frequently leading the conversation, would remind her mother of particulars forgotten by the elder lady. She recalled topics in Archibald's letters to her, speaking of his studies and approaching ordination.

Of him she spoke with less ardor than usual, Mrs. Atkins fancied; but Esther's love affair had been more like steadfast friendliness than ardent passion, as if filial love rendered all other emotions subservient to its domination. The morning was wearing away,—Esther having resumed some needle-work, laid aside when her illness began—when a carriage stopped at the gate. Mr. and Mrs. Warner alighted, and were met on the porch by Mrs. Atkins. They introduced themselves as they met.

"We have come for our daughter," Mrs. Warner said. "We grew a trifle anxious, and as the day is becoming cloudy, drove over for her, as well as to call upon you."

"Your daughter?" repeated Mrs. Atkins.

"Yes; Bessie left word she was coming to visit

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ESTHER ATKINS

you. Her sympathies have been so deeply wrought upon by your bereavement, she waived all ceremony to come to you."

"I hardly know what to say, Mrs. Warner," faltered the poor widow. "A young girl, the counterpart of my Esther, is here. Come in and judge for yourselves." She led the way into the sitting-room.

The girl arose as they entered and stood modestly expectant. The pause was awkward. "Mr. and Mrs. Warner," announced Mrs. Atkins; "they have called to see us."

The form in the blue dress advanced, no recognition in her face, which expressed simply courtesy.

"I am very pleased to meet you," said Esther's gentle voice, as she extended her hand to the callers. "Pray be seated."

"Bessie! Elizabeth!" broke from the lips of both parents. Mrs. Warner wrung her hands, and sank helplessly upon the offered seat.

"My God!" exclaimed Mr. Warner. "Why, she does not know us! Mother, is this our Elizabeth? Her very voice is changed. Oh, what has happened? My child," he addressed her vehemently, "we have come to take you home. Why do you look so strangely? Can you have forgotten us? Don't you know your own name?"

"Pardon me, Mr. Warner," said Esther with

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quiet dignity, "I do not exactly follow your meaning. There must be some mistake here. I am Esther Atkins. This is my mother. We have lived here nearly all my life. I presume you are the new inmates of the old Warner homestead. I have never seen either of your faces to my knowledge until this moment."

"Wife, this is not our Bessie's voice," said Mr. Warner; "but can we not be sure of our own child even in these clothes? Mrs. Atkins, I have Bessie's note in my pocket, saying she was coming to you. If this be not Bessie, where is our daughter?"

Esther took the note and read the few lines.

"I do not catch the drift of your talk, Mr. Warner," she said, "nor do I see why your daughter should wish to comfort *my* mother. I am here for all services she may require so long as life lasts. I will show you that I could not have written that note." She found a pencil as she was speaking, hastily copied a few lines on the reverse of the paper, and handed it to Mr. Warner. He looked at it, at her, and groaned aloud in his dismay. Mrs. Warner sobbed hysterically, and Mrs. Atkins went to get a glass of wine for the distracted woman.

"You will please excuse me if I withdraw," said Esther. "This is the first day I have been able to leave my room since my illness, and I am not

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ESTHER ATKINS

yet strong. Mother will explain if any explanation is needed of so plain a fact, that I am certainly her daughter and not yours. Good-day, Mrs. Warner. Good-by, Mr. Warner. We hope to see you again." Then she retired.

Mrs. Atkins, returning, prevailed upon Mrs. Warner to take the wine, and when somewhat restored to discuss the extraordinary and perplexing complication of the situation. Mrs. Atkins learned for the first time of the personal resemblance of the girls, of Bessie's interest in Esther, and the effect her death had produced. Every point of identity was discussed in search of a solution. It was a riddle beyond the reading of their minds.

What was to be done? Should the Warners persist in claiming the girl and force her to return to their protection, it might aggravate the trouble, for both parents were convinced that this personification, complete and mystifying in its very completeness, must be the result of some mental disorder. Finally Mrs. Atkins besought them, as Bessie was safe and free from all exciting influences under her roof, that they would allow her to remain. At the first sign of returning self-consciousness they should be summoned. To avoid comment it was to be understood by others that Miss Warner was making a visit to the cottage.

The singular relationship, so oddly begun, be-

THE STRANGE CASE OF

came only more and more real as day after day Miss Warner remained with Mrs. Atkins.

At times the mother's sense of loss was entirely dispelled. She could not address or think of the girl otherwise than as the child of her delight and sorrow. Under the spell of her presence it was impossible to act otherwise than in sympathetic response to the spirit abiding in the form so strangely the reflex image of her idolized Esther. How could she reason with facts quite beyond reason?

In her first distress she had privately sent a minute statement of the case to Archibald Erksine, begging him to come to her. He was on the eve of his ordination at the time of Esther's illness; the distance, as well as the circumstances, forbade the journey. He had accepted the great trial with the resignation of a Christian.

Some weeks elapsed before the young minister arrived. His letters meanwhile had been brief and to Mrs. Atkins only. The girl had made no comment when he wrote that he would await opportunity of explanation when they met face to face.

During this interval the Warners had become sincerely attached to the amiable mistress of the white cottage, as well as to Esther domiciled in the person of their own child.

ESTHER ATKINS

They had consulted physicians in the adjacent city, experts in all kinds of mental alienation, but from no one of them could they learn of a parallel case. No explanation could be found save in the Biblical "possession," that responded to a consideration of the facts.

The girl was an involuntary actor, ignorant of the rôle she could not be said to play, since she was all that she appeared to be—except the earthly garment in which she lived and moved.

They were advised to allow Time to solve the problem; and since their daughter's physical health was not involved, to hope for and expect a speedy resumption of normal conditions.

The Warners frequently took their new friends to drive, and the parental partnership established between them was not the least curious and pathetic feature of the case.

When Archibald Erksine was expected, Mrs. Atkins had arranged that "Esther" should be absent with the Warners. Their meeting was marked by repressed agitation. Erksine could not comprehend Mrs. Atkins's acceptance of the identity of Miss Warner with his Esther, her daughter.

Death he could understand; not this death in a new life, a dual personality for which the bereaved mother felt even an humble thankfulness. After all had been weighed and debated, she could only sigh, "Just wait and see!"

THE STRANGE CASE OF

Presently the carriage stopped, and Esther, alighting, walked cheerily up to the house. Her mother and her lover stood together: he pale and constrained. The sight of one so easily mistaken for his dead sweetheart moved him profoundly. Esther, on the contrary, was at ease and smiling:

"Oh, I never dreamed you'd be here so early!" she said, extending her hands, and looking straight into his eyes: "I must welcome the Reverend Mr. Erksine with due deference, I suppose," she began playfully—then paused.

"How changed you are, Archie," she cried; "have you been ill? Or is it your longer hair and this new beard that have altered you so?"

It was in truth the past suffering and strain that had left their impress upon his countenance—and a present overpowering consternation! For this *was* Esther! He could not gainsay it, any more than he could deny his own identity. He had fancied he could meet her unmoved, conscious that his promised wife lay under the clods of the churchyard—that he could defy, perhaps resent, a counterfeit of his lost one, even tho it had deceived the mother's more credulous nature.

But in an instant he had recognized that it was Esther indeed, and none other, who stood before him, and he rallied, took her hands tenderly, and reponded naturally, if not without effort.

Now it was the girl herself who seemed to with-

ESTHER ATKINS

draw, as if in that first searching gaze she had read distrust without comprehending its cause.

Two evenings later they were alone together—the first *tête-à-tête* Archibald had dared to risk. His brain was bewildered, his imagination perturbed; he was agitated by confusion and contradiction. The girl attracted him painfully; he *knew* she was not Esther, yet *felt* that she was! Even the shades of difference were imbued with peculiar fascination, as if Esther had appeared in a fantastic garb or a strange coiffure that became her only too well.

She sat thoughtfully by his side in the vine-shaded arbor that had often been their trysting-place during their simple courtship.

"I was about to ask you to come hither when you led me without the asking," said Esther's voice. "I often wonder if speech is not almost superfluous between kindred natures. You know how often we have replied to each other's letters before they were received, as they met and crossed on their way. I wonder now if you have divined what I have to say to you?"

She looked kindly but sadly into his eyes.

"No," he replied, meeting her look steadily; "a veil has fallen between us. Do you ever feel that you are not exactly the same Esther who pledged herself to me?"

The girl seemed troubled.

THE STRANGE CASE OF

"Yes," she said, hesitating; "it is of that I wish to speak, yet I shrink from the chance of giving you pain. I have pondered and prayed, oh! so fervently, of late for light and guidance. I think I have received both. Since my illness I can see things more clearly. My perceptions are painfully acute. You are changed. And do you not see how mother is failing?"

"Not seriously," Archibald answered. "She is always delicate."

"You may not, but to me it is very plain." Then the girl continued, as if she were repeating a lesson: "It fills my mind by day and by night. It has withdrawn me from you. I am only a daughter. I shall never be a wife. It is not my vocation. One should do what one is best fitted for, and only that. Archibald, you must release me from my promise to you. My life's devotion is pledged to my mother. I can not divide my allegiance. It would break her heart to be bereft of my loving care. I am vowed to her and her alone. As I grow nearer to her I withdraw from you. And I have lost your ring. I missed it as soon as I got well. You seem so far away—as if, with the ring, I had lost you! . . . Help me," she said more naturally; "you always did help me to my duty. Return me my word and my freedom that I may consecrate all that remains to us of life to my mother."

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ESTHER ATKINS

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"We have spoken of this before, you know," Archibald said, "and it was agreed that we were to share this solicitude and care. What has changed your mind?"

"Oh! I do not know, I do not know!" cried the poor girl in a perplexity of spirit most pitifully apparent in her voice and expression. "I only know it is so—that I have not been able to determine my duty to you, and that my heart is chilled toward you. You see, I can not touch your hand without distress. You have not kissed me since you came. I did long for your coming, but I was not glad after the first instant of our meeting. The word of a promise is nothing when its sense has departed. We no longer love each other as when our hearts were pledged. My illness has changed me. The love I bear my mother is the only love I can ever know."

Archibald watched her with tender pity. He understood better than she did her pathetic plight.

"Esther," he said solemnly, as if he addressed the dead, "by the power of the love I bore you once, and do bear you now, I am made able to help and serve you as your best friend. Put me aside wholly, if so it seem best to you. Call me when you need me. I will never fail you: of that be sure."

"I knew you were more than worthy, Archibald," she said after a pause. "I am exalted by

THE STRANGE CASE OF

your trust. God will bless, and in some way, in His own good time, reward you. Begin a new life: seek new ties. Esther's tomb is the heart of her mother. She is dead to you and to love forever."

Before he could reply she had risen, and seemed to dissolve into the twilight, so quick and noiseless was her passing.

Half distraught by contending emotions, the day after this interview Archibald Erskine left the village, and returned to his mission work in the far West.

A week later the girl arose early. Her manner was that of a sleep-walker. She groped in the depths of the closet, discovering the garments of Elizabeth Warner hidden there at her coming, and dressing herself in those, stole down the stairs and passed out into the silent morning.

She walked directly to the Warner homestead. As she drew near the house, a maid was sweeping the front porch. "Good morning, Miss Elizabeth," said she, "I'm glad to see you home again."

"What nonsense!" returned Miss Warner, "I've only been to the bridge."

She went upstairs; her bedroom door was open. She entered, sat down before the mirror, and removed her hat. Her head ached in a dull, dazed way. A thick portière hung at the door that led into her mother's room.

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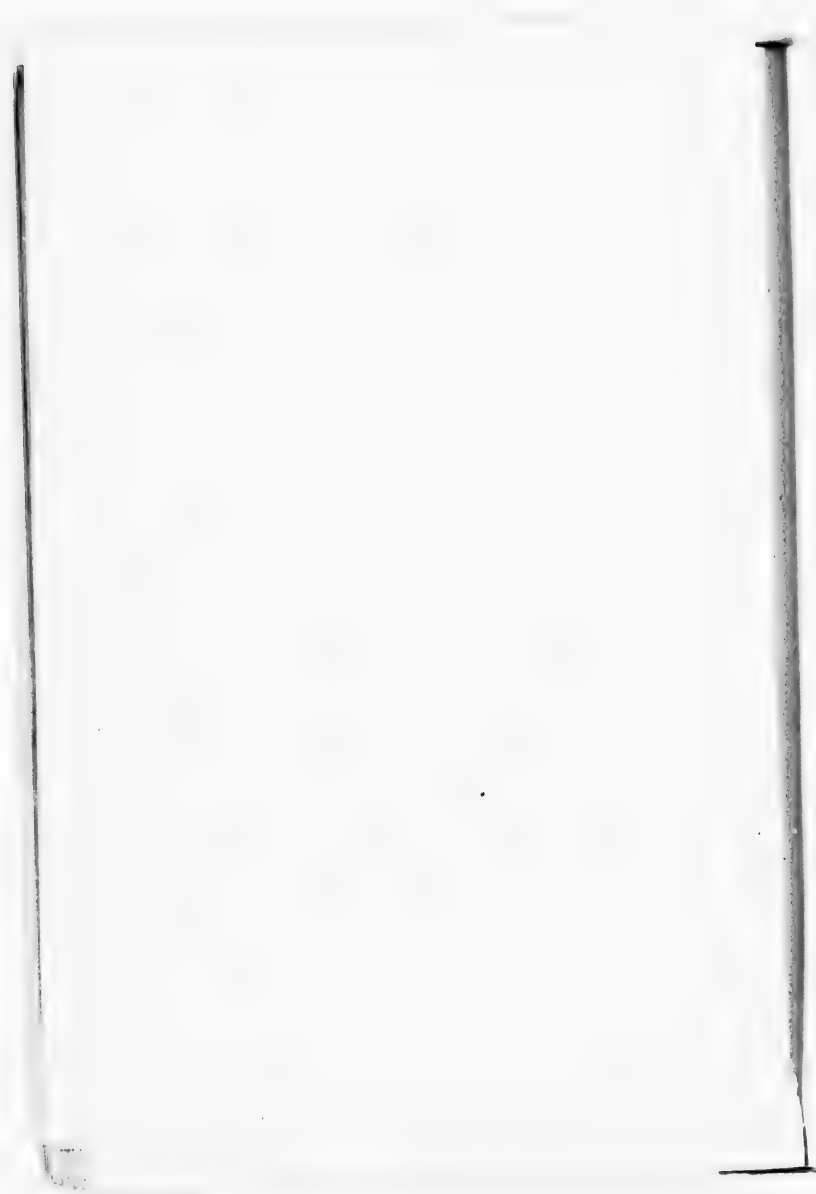
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ESTHER ATKINS

"Are you awake, mama?" she asked.

Mrs. Warner sprang up.

"Listen, Charles, listen! Bessie has come back," she gasped.

"Thank God! Go to her; but be careful what you tell her," was his low reply.

"Yes, dear," called Mrs. Warner, and passed into her daughter's room.

Elizabeth sat as if stupefied, staring out of her window.

"What is it, daughter?" her mother asked.

"Oh! mama, I have such a queer headache; and what is the matter? I can not remember that the roses were blooming yesterday. See! the bushes are all in bloom and in May!"

"No, no; it is June the 21st, Bessie—you have forgotten," said her mother. "Lie down and I will bathe your head. Don't try to think yet."

"Why—why not?" she cried. "Oh, mama, have I been ill? Is that why I can not remember?"

Mrs. Warner caught at the suggestion. "Yes, my child," she assented; "quite, quite ill. You hurt your head, you know, and have been flighty."

"Did I fall on my way to the cottage—and was it a month ago?"

"Yes, dear, yes; but you must not talk or think of it now."

Mrs. Warner was removing Bessie's dress as she

THE STRANGE CASE OF

spoke, substituting a wrapper, and coaxing her to lie upon the couch. Then giving her a nervine, and bathing her brows, she soothed her into a natural slumber.

From that short sleep she awoke to take up her life again as Elizabeth Warner.

In reviewing her condition of supposed delirium, she told her mother it was delightful to be out of one's mind, since all her visions had been of a life amid lovely scenes bathed in a luminous life-giving atmosphere, in fellowship with beings of angelic aspect.

She was not allowed to dwell upon these memories; her doctors had expressly forbidden it.

For three weeks Elizabeth moved about the house as formerly. The Warners were an unemonstrative family, such as one often finds in New England; the daughter of strong personality, but always under the sway of the habitual repression that pervaded the household. Whatever was forbidden her, she tried to dismiss from her thoughts.

The intimacy of the families continued. At the end of the three weeks Miss Warner and her parents called one day as usual to take Mrs. Atkins for a drive.

As the twilight deepened, Bessie became very quiet; indeed, she half dozed in her seat next Mrs. Atkins. They stopped at her gate. Mr.

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ESTHER ATKINS

Warner opened the door of the carriage; Mrs. Atkins alighted.

Then a voice—*Esther's* voice—said, as the girl sprang after her: "Be careful, mother, the path is damp. Thank you so much for our pleasant ride, Mrs. Warner. I do think they are doing the little mither so much good. Come over again soon—do. Good-night."

Esther led her mother to the cottage, while Mrs. Warner wept over her Bessie's relapse.

Her second return to the Warner homestead occurred late in August, but her stay was even more brief. Mrs. Atkins's health was visibly failing, and the girl's solicitude when with her affected even the robust constitution of the daughter of the Warners.

During this home-staying, Elizabeth was ill at ease, and her parents were hardly surprised when she once again as adroitly as before resumed her post beside the lonely widow at the Atkins cottage.

Not many days after her third resumption of the rôle of "Esther Atkins," a message from her reached the Warners. Mrs. Atkins was very ill. Mr. Warner telegraphed for a trained nurse, and Mrs. Warner went at once to the side of the sick woman, her heart full of distress as she awaited the effect upon her daughter. As the girl moved about the room, Mrs. Warner felt herself in the presence of something superhuman.

THE STRANGE CASE OF

The girl slept not, hardly tasted food, seemed upheld by a strength not of this world, sustained in her angelic ministrations by a faith that did not falter, a love that could not fail. She sang by the bedside of the sleepless sufferer, soothed her by tone and touch—such accents as never could have issued from Elizabeth Warner's lips.

The dying woman recognized, rested in, the pure presence of her child. At times her mind would wander, but at a word in the voice of Esther the soft eyes would open upon the beloved face, the weak fingers clasp the beloved hand, the wan lips utter some phrase of endearment to the daughter who had in truth been faithful *unto the end*.

The end came so peacefully at last, as she lay in the young girl's arms, that the watchers thought they slept. They loosed her clasp. The girl gave one inquiring look at the fixed features, and sank into unconsciousness complete as catalepsy beside the lifeless form.

In this condition the Warners bore her home, and her restoration was followed by nervous prostration little short of collapse. Careful nursing and rest, seconding her natural strength, led to gradual recovery.

Late in the autumn her parents, fearing some local influence might induce relapse, or that even chance gossip might reveal her forgotten sojourn under Mrs. Atkins's roof, decided to winter in

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ESTHER ATKINS

Southern California, where Mr. Warner's brother had settled some years before.

In time the Warner place passed into strange hands, for the family never returned.

Five years later, by one of those strange chances which may be called fate, the Rev. Archibald Erksine, whose health had been impaired by his arduous labors, was called to the rectorship of a small but vigorous church in the town where the Warner family resided. Time and change of climate had so modified the outward semblance of Miss Warner that he had known her for some months as an earnest and intelligent worker among his parishioners, and was greatly attracted both by her person and character, before he identified her as the maiden linked to the one baffling mystery of his life.

When he did identify her it was only to rivet the bond between them, as if Esther had foreseen and elected Elizabeth to be his earthly partner and helpmeet.

In due time she became his wife. Their first born was a son, and received the name of his maternal grandfather. At the birth of the second child, a girl, there was much debate on the subject of a name for her.

The father sat by the bed whereon lay mother and child.

"I have been thinking, Archie," said the mother,

CASE OF ESTHER ATKINS

"that, if you have no objection, I should like to call our daughter Esther. It is a sweet old Bible name, and I have a peculiar association with it. When we moved to C—— ten years ago, a young girl of that name died there. Oh! you must know; she was the daughter of the distant relative who made you her heir—Mrs. Atkins. They said we looked alike. I have recalled her so often lately, and I would like to keep her name in our home."

"Certainly," Mr. Erksine replied. "It is very sweet and tender in you to have thought of it. Esther it shall be."

So Esther Atkins Erksine began her life. The Rev. Archibald Erksine was a model husband, but he sacredly withheld one secret from his wife, the his only daughter's name served as a perpetual reminder of the first and lost love of his youth.

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Jacob City

By

A. Stewart Clarke

Illustrations

By

Charles Johnson Post

JACOB CITY

THE sun is shining hotly on the roofs of Jacob City. 'Tis seven o'clock, and yet the rocks, which thrust their naked shoulders from among the motley collection of rough buildings that line the straggling street along the bottom of the gulch and bunch in confusion on either side, still reflect a scorching heat.

The air is dancing and throbbing over the tops of the sage-brush and rising in waves from the ribs of limestone that seam the slope. A hundred houses and a few larger buildings with imposing fronts and weather-beaten signs, on which the traces of letters are faintly discernible, clustered together in a sun-baked ravine: such is Jacob City.

The doors of many houses stand open, yet none seems to invite hospitality; no smoke rises from their chimneys and no sound breaks the silence that broods within their walls. Piles of rusted cans lie here and there in heaps, and bottles of many shapes and dimensions, in various stages of

JACOB CITY

preservation, are scattered in all directions. Sagebrush and cactus now dispute the way where once mule-teams dragged their heavy loads through blinding clouds of dust. Near to what had at one time been the business center a pretentious-looking adobe structure stands facing an open space overgrown with briars. The dust lies thick on the broad flight of wooden steps that leads to its main entrance, over which "The Windsor," painted in black letters, is still clearly legible; it coats the railings in front and clings to the sills of the door; it crusts the windows and adheres to the tattered curtains inside. Unheeded it covers the face of the big mirror behind the bar and rests undisturbed among the glasses left where they had last been used. Various articles of furniture are scattered about the premises; an overturned chair lies in the middle of the floor, and others stand about a number of small tables at the far end of the room. A corner of a pool-table is visible thru the open door of an adjoining room and the dial of a clock peeps from a shelf on the wall. Cobwebs darken the windows and hide in the silent halls; they hang from the crumbling ceilings and swing in the open doors. Within and without dust, drought, and desolation everywhere.

Twenty years before, Jacob City had been a thriving mining-camp. Lead was then selling for nearly five dollars and silver at over a dollar and

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JACOB CITY

a quarter. The ores that were mined in the neighborhood returned a handsome profit when shipped to Salt Lake City, and good wages were paid the miners. But the price of both lead and silver had declined steadily, and with it the prosperity of the camp.

Mine after mine shut down, and only those producing the richest ores continued operations. Soon they were compelled to close, and many of the inhabitants, who had held on in hope of a change for the better, found themselves too poor to pay for transportation elsewhere, and were obliged to leave their belongings and foot it to other diggings.

Now no footfall ever resounds through its silent streets; unmolested, the coyotes sleep through the heat of the day among the tinsel and faded finery, where red-shirted miners were wont to ogle their favorites and "set up the wine" between the acts at Doolan's Opera-House; unharmed, the badgers burrow and delve in the public square outside, and jack-rabbits dodge in the dust as the sun goes down. None remains of the crowds that swaggered and drank, gambled and fought, from day to day save the silent few who years ago went to their long sleep on the slope of the hill.

Scarcely discernible amid the gray sage-brush that covers a sandy knoll, a few rough slabs and pieces of rotten wood mark the forlorn resting-place of the long-since-forgotten dead. As the

JACOB CITY

dusk deepens, shadowy shapes steal forth into the night and invisible feet tread the narrow streets. Once more the lights of "The Windsor" flicker and flare from the narrow windows, and bunched in the little square outside men loiter in idle groups. An energetic brass band, perched on Doolan's balcony, rends the air with strident music, as if to make up in vigorous action for its paucity of numbers.

Across the street and a little farther down the light from two huge torches plays on the features of a resplendent individual, who is painting in glowing terms the virtue of his great elixir. Gold eagles take the place of buttons on his long blue frock coat, and his wide, bespangled sombrero is said to have cost five hundred Mexican dollars. He had arrived in town that morning in a coach drawn by six magnificent horses, with a vision of blond fluffiness and peachblow at his side that set the town agog. Nick Terhune had been heard to say that the doctor's wife could give cards and spades and little casino to the queen of the Mardi Gras in New Orleans and then beat her out for beauty.

The pair are quartered at the Windsor, where they have paid a fabulous price for the use of the parlor and best bedroom of that "mansion of comfort and elegance," as the local paper put it. Bills have been distributed during the day, announcing

JACOB CITY

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that "a grand free open-air performance will take place every evening during the coming week, at eight o'clock, in which will appear some of the world's greatest artists." A stage has been erected, and the beauty of the morning, assisted by the lesser lights of the aggregation, has drawn a crowd that is proving a profitable mine to the illustrious doctor, who smiles blandly as he scans the faces before him and with marvelous dexterity deals out his "cure-all" in exchange for the dollars of the eager miners.

Nothing escapes his keen scrutiny, and, as if gifted with the powers of divination, ere scarce desire has given birth to decision in the mind of some hesitating applicant the doctor has taken in the situation, and almost before his victim realizes it he has parted with his dollars and is happy in the possession of the wonderful nostrum.

The doctor has studied human nature to some purpose, and as the wavering light of the torches reveals from time to time the features and attitude of the various individuals before him he reads them as he would the pages of an open book.

Men of many lands and divers races are there, some from remote corners of the earth, each bearing the distinctive features of the country that has given him birth, yet all having one resemblance in common indelibly stamped upon their features, indicative of the dominant passion of the community

JACOB CITY

—the thirst for gold. Fair-haired Swedes with ruddy complexions and rather placid, good-natured faces; Finlanders pale almost to sallowness, large-limbed and loose-jointed, with dust-colored hair and beards; indolent Mexicans with restless black eyes and the eternal cigarette; sturdy, hard-featured Scots; robust, dogmatic Englishmen, and the ubiquitous representative of the Emerald Isle, jostle one another as they come and go. Representatives as readily recognizable from the various parts of the Union are not wanting to complete the collection.

At last the doctor deems it wise to close his performance for the night, and after a final song he makes his announcement of the program for the next evening.

"Rum go, that, mate," remarks a miner to his companion who has been watching the dollars flow into the doctor's pocket. "All the fools ben't dead yet," he continues as they move up the street. "Whisky's good enough for me—take somethin'."

The bar of the Windsor is doing its usual brisk business as the men step in, and it is some time before they are waited on. At last the bartender turns to them, and as he does so a big man with massive shoulders and brawny limbs, whose wants he has just attended to, brings down his glass with a crash on the bar and stands staring with wide-open eyes apparently at something just at his

JACOB CITY

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elbow. His face is ghastly, his lips twitch convul-
sively, and beads of perspiration gather on his
brow. "The tenderfoot woman!" he gasps in a
hoarse whisper. The clatter of glass as the bar-
tender sweeps the pieces off the bar seems to recall
him. "Busted a glass? Well, 'tain't's if I
couldn't pay for it."

"That's all right, Hank," remarks the barten-
der, sliding another glass toward him. The big
man fills it with brandy, and draining it at a gulp
he throws down a dollar and lurches from the
room.

"Got 'em bad to-night," observes the bartender
as he takes the miners' orders. "The tenderfoot
woman's been in her grave more'n a year. How's
that? Oh, she's allus called that ever since the
day she struck camp with a curly-headed kid in
her arms. Nobody ever know'd anything 'bout
her; give out her name was Brown; but nobody
b'lieved that, for she never seemed to know that
any one was talkin' to her when they called her
by that name."

The tenderfoot woman had kept her secret well
and had taken it with her to the grave. Bill, the
stage-driver, said the day she arrived that "she'd
rode the hull way from Salt Lake and never spoke
to any one." Once, he confessed, he asked her
"to have somethin' to eat, when they'd stopped for
dinner, but she'd only shook her head and dug up

JACOB CITY

somethin' for the kid from a paper box she carried."

How the miners laughed when it became noised abroad that she was goin' to "take in washin'"! "Old gag, that! She'd wash for a livin'!"

But wash she did, and soon Sam Lee, the Chinaman, and his satellites were glad to work for her.

When the miners found she meant business they fairly swamped her with work, and she prospered and was happy—happy in her boy, the light of her eyes. Men knew that, as he grew to manhood, he was oftener gambling than working; that he was lazy, and tho fair to look on, he was "no good," as they expressed it. None ever told the mother so, however, and she saw in him only what was manly and brave.

One Christmas night it happened that he "sat in a game" at the Windsor with a number of miners, among whom was big Hank Hardy, a noted "bad man" of the camp. No one would say just how it occurred; some hinted that "Curly," as he was called, had stooped for some matches that had dropped to the floor and had seen cards on Hank's knee; but however that may have been, in the row that followed Curly was shot thru the heart. No cards were found on Hank, and he was acquitted afterward on the ground of self-defense.

The day that Curly was buried the tenderfoot woman had encountered Hank in the street.

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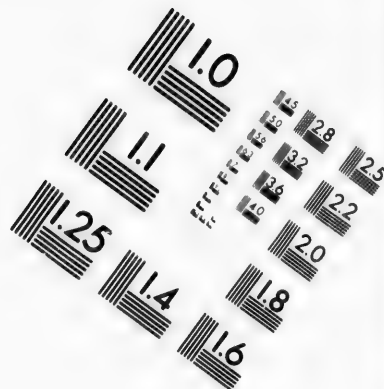
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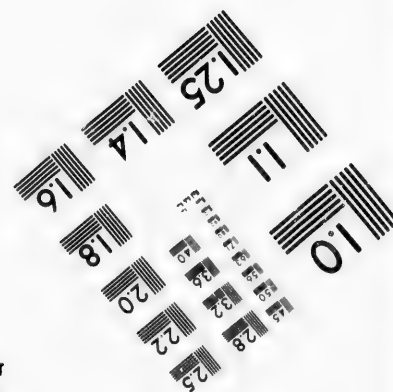
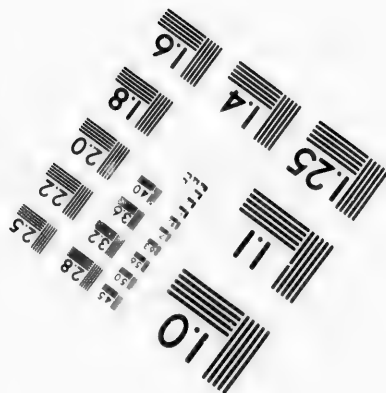
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JACOB CITY

Drawing herself up to her full height, she confronted him as he tried to slink past her, and pointing with trembling finger, she said: "His blood be on your head and the curse of Cain be yours!"

"Don't believe Hank'll last the year out," remarked the bartender as he made change for the miner a few moments later. "He's breakin' up fast."

As the two men leave the Windsor an old man with flowing beard and iron-gray hair toils heavily up the street. He has a big basket on his arm, and he evidently feels it heavy, for he changes it frequently from arm to arm, and every now and then he sets it down to rest himself. For a mile or more after he has cleared the outskirts of the town he climbs slowly upward; then following a trail that branches off from the more traveled road, he doubles back along a ridge that faces the town from the west, and crossing the summit at a point nearly opposite that from where he had started, he follows the farther side of the ridge to where it ends in a rocky butte that overlooks the valley and Great Salt Lake in the distance.

The moon has risen now, and the heavens are clear and cloudless. After disposing of the contents of the basket in a "lean-to" against the side of a small cabin, perched under the shadow of the butte, the old man brings out a chair and seats

JACOB CITY

himself by the open door. He is breathing heavily and his limbs tremble. It had been a long pull and the basket seemed heavier than usual. Many times a year for the past five years he has carried that basket back and forth from the town. Every winter has found him hard at work in the mines, and every summer has seen him prospecting the neighboring hills. So it has been for five, ten, twenty, forty years, in many parts of the country, since before the days of '49 and California.

At first, when others had struck it rich, he had wished them well and smiled when he heard them talk of what they were going to do now that they "had money to burn." His turn would come, he felt sure of that, and then—he had scarcely dared think of that! But as the days rolled into months and the months into years, and the years stretched away behind him like a long, dusty road, in which there had been no turning nor tarrying, he began to lose faith in that future which had seemed so full of promise. Hope died out in his heart, and there remained of the wayward fires of youth but a flickering flame and the gray ashes of old age. From the grave of buried hopes resignation had arisen with healing touch, and whispered that all was for the best; yet it required all the old man's steadfast faith to quiet the tumultuous rush of feeling that came over him at the thought of what

JACOB CITY

might have been. A yearning for the love and companionship that had been denied him filled his heart with vain regret for the long years spent in fruitless toil. Had it not been wiser? Ah, who can see the future!

To-night, as the moonlight softened the outline of the hills and bathed the valley below in a silver sheen, a flood of recollection carried him three thousand miles away. In fancy he could see the little New England village in which he had been born. There, at the cross-roads, were the hay-scales where he used to play "I spy," and, just beyond, the red bridge that spanned the river. How white the houses looked! Yes, he remembered now, they were all painted either light yellow or white, and many of the latter had green shutters; he had never seen the like elsewhere. Opposite the post-office, a little farther up the street, was the village green with the baseball diamond, where the boys from "up the road" and "down the road" used to battle on Saturday afternoons, and once in a while, in the early evening, their elders indulged in a game of quoits.

And there was the "meetin'-house." He remembered when he had found a key which would unlock its basement door, and how for a long year he had kept his secret with a proud consciousness of what he could tell if he only would. There on the brow of the hill was a rambling old house with

JACOB CITY

a grape-vine covering one end and a huge chimney thrust thru the center of the roof. The richest man in the county had lived there—said to be worth \$50,000; and there, in later years, in that garden with its old-fashioned flowers, a pair of hazel eyes had looked into his as he had said good-by. He could see the graceful figure, the clear-cut features, and the questioning, half-reproachful look with which the announcement of his coming departure had been received.

The May air is once more sweet with the perfume of the arbutus, and he feels a mighty tugging at his heart-strings as he remembers that mute appeal. Yes, she loved him then—he knew it now; and he would meet her there—there, beyond the "Great Divide," where in the sunlight of undying love there blooms the snow-white flower of immortality.

The face of the dying man lights up with joy, and peacefully, as one who falls asleep, his eyes close and his spirit takes its flight.

Down in the town the night wears on. At three o'clock the streets are deserted, but in the Windsor barroom there is a hum of many voices, and men are seated at the various tables engrossed in divers games. Suddenly, like a thunderbolt, a wild-eyed man bursts into the room swinging a huge "44" in circles above his head. It is at full cock,

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Wheeling suddenly, he fires point-blank.



Wheeling suddenly, he fires point-blank.

JACOB CITY

and as he lowers his arm the muzzle seems to cover every man in the room. One look at his frenzied face is sufficient, and with one accord there is a rush for the doors. Men who would have fought like wildcats over their game tumble over one another in their eagerness to escape.

"If I've got to die, I'm goin' to have company!" yells the maniac, flourishing his weapon.

The bartender peeps from behind the bar and wonders whether he can reach his gun; but at his first movement the man in the middle of the room turns his head quickly and listens. The bartender drops on his knees and fairly holds his breath. The minutes seem hours, but at length he hears footsteps on the sidewalk—pit-pat, pit-pat—and now they enter the room.

"Drop that gun!"

The man in the middle of the room glances first at the sheriff, who has spoken and who is immediately in front of him, and then at his deputy, some ten feet to his right. For an instant he hesitates, and then wheeling suddenly he fires point-blank at the latter. The deputy's hat falls to the ground with a bullet-hole in it, and at the same moment he and the sheriff both fire.

"You're not hurt, are you, Steele?" asks the sheriff a moment later as he stoops over the body of the man who had fallen at his feet.

"No. Poor devil, he must 've been dead crazy."

JACOB CITY

The body is removed to an adjoining room and in a short time the games are again in progress. Nobody ever knows more about the man they buried in a nameless grave next day than that he had been in town for several days, that he had been drinking hard, and that he had said he had "been sheep-herdin'."

"Lucky thing that Ward and the deputy happened to be in Shorty's, wasn't it?" remarks a man to his neighbor. "Don't believe any one else'd had the nerve to tackle that chap."

As the speaker finishes a deep rumbling wakes the echoes of the hills. The window-cases rattle, the lights go out, the crowds that have thronged the night scatter to the four corners of the earth—all except the silent few who creep back to their sandy beds on the hill; and dust and desolation reign once more in Jacob City.

"Hello! Guess I must 've been asleep," exclaims Austin Haywood, rousing himself from where he had been resting in the shade of an old bunk-house, near the "Hidden Treasure" mine. "Storm comin' up, too, and I'm not likely to see Stockton before twelve o'clock," he continues as a peal of thunder sounds in the distance. "Curious dream, that," he muses as he unhitches a horse standing near. "But if lead keeps up the old mine's worth leasing."

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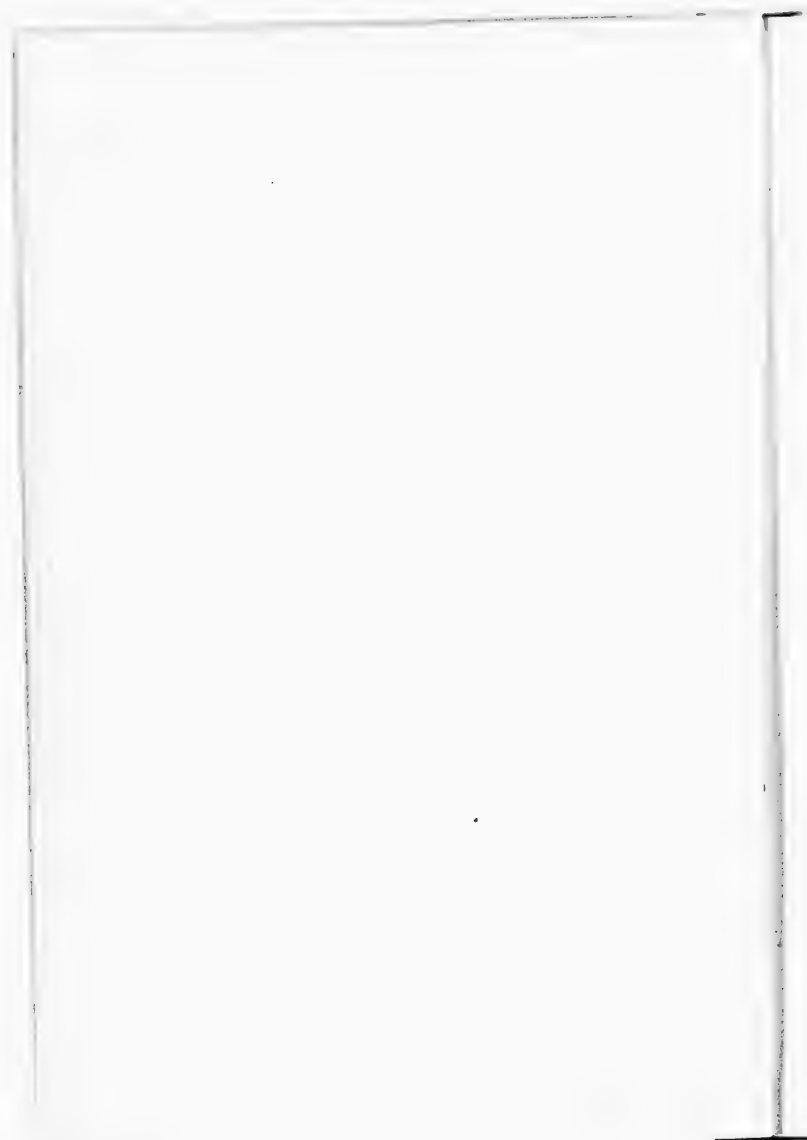
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Selma the Soprano

**By
Mabel Wagnalls**

**Illustrations
By
Freeland A. Carter**



SELMA THE SOPRANO.

"I hold it true that thoughts are things,
Endowed with bodies, breath, and wings,
And after you have quite forgot
Or all outgrown some vanished thought,
Back to your mind to make its home
A dove or raven it will come."

—*Ella Wheeler Wilcox.*

INTRODUCTION.

As a background to the situations of the ensuing narrative the reader must be acquainted with an event that occurred many years before in Kingston, Tenn. A woman named Margaret Holmes, who had been convicted of the murder of her husband, was sentenced to be hanged on the morning of June 3, 18—. The day arrived, the crowd assembled, and the woman was led to her doom. They say she mounted the steps without support, and faced the throng without wincing. She had left her long brown hair loose and flowing, and wore a plain white cotton gown. When the sheriff bade her speak her last words, she replied:

"There is nothing to say."

But then a strange thing occurred. As the pos-

SELMA THE SOPRANO

sessed by a sudden idea, she began singing, simply as a child—

“Mid pleasures and palaces, tho we may roam.”

She did not seem to care whether the people liked it, or even listened. Her manner was like one singing to herself.

But the rough crowd did like it, and listened with growing intensity, for her voice was strong and clear, and her last heart-throbs seemed to be finding expression in this sweet song.

“A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there.”

She sank to her knees, and the words seemed a prayer.

It must indeed have been wonderful and heart-moving to see this pale woman with fettered hands and the gallows for a background singing of Home.

The effect on her hearers became greater with every phrase. Not a movement or a whisper marred the spell.

“And the birds singing gaily
That came at my call,—
Give me them with that peace of mind
Dearer than all.”

The last sweet words of the ballad fell from her lips. There were birds singing about her, and all nature seemed to breathe of joy; but birds and music do not concern the law.

SELMA THE SOPRANO

The hangman stepped forward and laid his hand upon the woman's shoulder. It was at this moment, so we are told, that a force mightier than the law began to reveal itself.

There was a murmur, at first slight, but soon augmented by many voices, and then a movement. Like one creature the crowd swayed forward, and a cry arose louder and higher—"Release her!"

They clambered on to the scaffold and wrenched the rope from the sheriff's hand. Then their impulse grew to a fury. They tore the rope apart, and cut it and stamped upon it. The gallows too was attacked. They broke it, and split it, and chipped it, and whittled it until no semblance of a gallows remained.

The sheriff and jailer were powerless, and there was nothing to do but lead the prisoner back to jail.

The affair was talked about far and near, and ere long there was presented to the governor such an overwhelming petition for pardon that he could not do otherwise than grant it—as her conviction had been upon circumstantial evidence only.

We learn that after the pardon she lived with her only child, a boy named Arthur, in a small house on the outskirts of the town.

Years went by. The murder remained a mystery, and Margaret Holmes's innocence was still unproved when she died, some ten years later.

SELMA THE SOPRANO

After burying his mother, Arthur, now grown to manhood, moved to Knoxville, the nearest town of any size. Thereafter only investigating lawyers, and some few participants of the scene, ever referred to it. But this picture of his mother's terrible trial was indelibly impressed upon Arthur's mind. The shadows of dead men's deeds are like those of a dying day: they measure much greater than the forms that cast them. The darkness of a crime reaches far down the avenue of Time, and the people who come near it change their life's course to avoid it. For we are timid mortals, who quake and shake at shadows.

CHAPTER I.

ARTHUR HOLMES was destined to succeed, for he was one who took life seriously and wasted no time. He entered the printing-office at Knoxville, and in two years had attained an editorial position. And with it all he was frugal and of simple tastes.

He rented rooms in the house of a crippled old lady whose only maintenance was the income thus derived, and whose only solace was an occasional visit from thoughtful friends. Arthur frequently spent an hour in her presence, reading or talking to pass the time. It was here that he first met Selma.

She was singing before he entered the room, and

SELMA THE SOPRANO

when he knocked at the door he heard the interrupted phrase end in a dainty musical shriek of startled surprise. Then followed the merriest kind of a sweet-toned laugh accompanying the light footsteps of the singer, who came forward to open the door.

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that Arthur Holmes was in love with Selma before he saw her. But when she stood before him and opened her big brown eyes with surprise to see this handsome young man—why, then Arthur thought her adorable.

The invalid introduced the young people, and told all about Selma: how she had just returned from the East after a two-years' course of music, and how, thoughtful as ever, she had lost no time in coming to sing for her helpless old friend.

"Do sing on," implored our young editor;—"unless you object to my listening?"

"Certainly not," answered Selma. "What shall I sing? Do you like 'Carmen'?" And then, without waiting for an answer, she commenced the "Habenera." She imparted such an amount of witchery to this wild gypsy melody that one could almost hear the castanets and see the dancing.

When the song had come to an end, Arthur, thoroughly enraptured, murmured: "Please sing more."

Then she sang an "Ave Maria." If before she

SELMA THE SOPRANO

had looked like a gypsy, now she looked like a nun, as, standing near the window, the light of the setting sun illumined her expressive features. But she was not conscious of this, nor striving for any effect, for she had become lost in her singing—the enchantment of sweet melody. The gathering twilight enwrapped her in a veil of mystery, and her listeners, too, seemed enthralled by the power of the hour and the music. The last song she sang was the sweetest of all—a German ballad, “*Ich liebe dich*” (“I love you”). One might suppose this selection was prompted by some impulse of coquetry; but Selma had no such thought. The song is a famous one, and had merely suggested itself. Once launched upon its tender strain, Selma sang with her soul in the words. They were German, however, and evidently not understood by the invalid at least, for she said when the song was done: “It seemed to be telling a beautiful story.”

But Arthur was silent. This method of approbation was rather puzzling to Selma. It led her to infer that he understood neither German nor music.

She presently started to go, and softly sang the opening words of the love duo from “Faust”—

“I must hasten away,—it groweth late.”

She continued to warble the melody as she was

SELMA THE SOPRANO

putting on her hat. When she came to the pause where the tenor voice should come in, great was her surprise to hear the part taken up and quietly hummed by Arthur. She turned around, smiling, and quickly joined in with the soprano music. Arthur, too, was smiling as they finished with a vociferous "la-la" this great and grand duet.

"Then you do know music," announced Selma, evidently pleased at the discovery.

"Just enough to love it," was the more modest than truthful answer, for Arthur was naturally musical, and had learned a good deal of the art.

They both said "Good-day" to the invalid, and Arthur accompanied Selma home. He talked of the few operas he had heard and the many he wanted to hear, and Selma promised to sing for him all of her best-known arias. She found out also that he knew German, and had understood every word of "Ich liebe dich."

All this during their first short walk together. They saw each other frequently after this—most often at the house of their mutual friend, the invalid; but sometimes, too, at Selma's home. Here, with her piano and all her books, they had glorious hours of music. Harmony itself seemed to be drawing them together. She sang to him and taught him her favorite songs, and she told him and described to him all the operas she knew. Of these, "Hamlet" was the one she loved best.

SELMA THE SOPRANO

"It is music to enthral one!" she impulsively exclaimed, as they were turning over the score one day. "The opera differs from the play, you know; it has in it the scene where Ophelia dies—the mad scene—the most beautiful thing you ever heard or imagined. It abounds in the vagaries of a demented mind—mingled joy and sorrow; tho really the saddest of all is where she tries to be gay, for throughout all the music there is a ring of perpetual pain."

Here Selma softly played one part and sweetly sang the melody. Arthur was turning the music for her, and they both together went on through the scene. It was a fascinating task. Selma would hum and sing and play, or perhaps read aloud the text, while Arthur, standing beside her, would also sing snatches, or whistle a phrase, or beat the time as the occasion required.

More often, when she knew it not, he was looking at her instead of at the score. He longed to touch her wavy hair or the curve of her pretty ear. Sometimes he leaned down very near—so as to see the fine print of the music. Not "mad" nor "sad," but only glad seemed the music that day to him.

Where Selma remembered the words she would stand up and sing, interspersing her performance with bits of description as her imagination dictated.

"Ophelia tries to sing an old ballad; but the

SELMA THE SOPRANO

poor girl has scarcely begun before she forgets all about it, and breaks out into a wild, ringing laugh and then into passionate sobs. It is all done in music, you know—perfect rhythm and harmony."

Selma then sang for him that wonderful staccato laugh of the opera with its brilliant high note followed by the moaning, melodious minor sob.

"I could cry as I sing it," she declared impressively,—“the music reveals so much. It is grief without hope and joy without memory alternating in the mind of the mad girl."

Arthur was silent for a moment, and then he spoke quite thoughtfully.

"Do you know, the music makes the plot all wrong! If Ophelia sang anything like that, do you know what the result must have been?"

He had clasped Selma's hand in his, and was looking tenderly into her eyes.

"If she sang like that, I say, Hamlet must have loved her and clung to her in spite of his father's ghost!"

He pressed her soft hand to his lips; but at the same time, even as he spoke the word, something seemed to clutch at his heart—a memory, a fact, a phantom: *his own father had been murdered!* Why did he think of this now?

For one moment Arthur seemed far away from Selma, and a chill silence encompassed him. But

SELMA THE SOPRANO

soon, with a distinct effort, he released himself from the thought.

He stepped nearer to Selma, and heard her saying softly, as she fingered the piano with her hand that was free:

"But Hamlet does love Ophelia even more in the opera than in the play. See, this is his love-song—the most beautiful theme in the opera." And she sang quietly this lovely melody, which is indeed the center-stone of the musical crown that Thomas has given to Shakespeare's "Hamlet."

"Doubt that the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt Truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love!"

"It is glorious!" murmured Arthur. "Sing it again—do!"

She repeated it, and he sang with her; and after the last line—"never doubt I love"—he softly added, "you!"

It was scarcely more than a whisper; but Selma turned as she heard it, and their eyes met in one glad glance of recognition.

"Selma, how I love you!" he softly exclaimed. "Your music transports me! I am in heaven when I hear you."

He drew her gently toward him, and as he did so gazed on her face with a look of absolute rever-

SELMA THE SOPRANO

ence. Her music was to him like something divine, and she herself a precious treasure.

"Selma, can you know how happy I am?"

"Yes, I know," was her impulsive answer, "for I too am so happy! Arthur, it seems as tho we have always loved each other!"

She hid her face on his shoulder, and he stroked her hair and kissed it between the words that he murmured:

"It is true. We have needed no words to understand, but have read each other like an open book. You must have known my feelings from the first."

And then she again answered: "Yes! And your presence affected me so! I wanted to be near you every moment. To have you the other side of the room seemed far away."

She was looking up now, and her face was quite aglow with the earnest joy of her words. "Arthur, it is so restful to be near you!" She looked long and steadily at the face she loved. She admired his deep, thoughtful eyes that always told so much more than his words—tho when he spoke his vibrant voice had never failed to thrill her as it did now.

"I believe, Selma dear, that such love as ours is a gift that is seldom bestowed; it is something to cherish and guard. We were meant for each other. It can not be otherwise."

SELMA THE SOPRANO

And all that afternoon the music of love in their hearts was attuned to the perfect harmony of their natures. They really believed that Heaven was guiding them, and the angels were smiling upon them. Perhaps they were smiling—sadly—at the paucity of human joy.

It is true, indeed, that Arthur and Selma loved each other in a way that others who had never experienced it could not even comprehend. And so Selma's mother did not realize the extent of the pain she was causing when she vigorously opposed their engagement. She was a Southern woman, somewhat proud of her aristocratic lineage, and particularly proud of her only daughter. It is not surprising that Mrs. Marvin's blood ran cold at the idea of Selma's marrying a man whose mother had been convicted of murder, sentenced to be hanged, and actually stood under the gallows, and who, tho released, had never been proven innocent.

Selma had not taken this view of the matter, and it was no easy task to disabuse her of the idea that loving a man was sufficient reason for marrying him. It is doubtful whether she ever changed her mind on this point; but certain it is that after three days of tears and arguments, Mrs. Marvin persuaded Selma that she was too young to know her own mind, and that it is always best to obey one's mother.

Mrs. Marvin dictated a letter of polite dismissal

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to Arthur, and then sent her daughter back to New York.

Selma grew a little thin and a little pale; but she was not given to complaining, and hence no one fully realized the heartache she endured. There were times when she could not work or talk or sleep.

As for Arthur, the contents of that letter came upon him like a crushing blow. Strange, how one small sheet of paper can carry such a heavy weight! For the previous month he had been living in a perfect enchantment of music, and Selma's spirit of loveliness had filled his soul every hour. He had been carried as in a dream to his proposal. But this letter was a cruel awakening. He was brought back to thought and to pain—a pain that sank deep in the old, old groove, recalling the past and his mother. Is it any wonder that he divined the reason, and that something of bitterness came into his heart as the first sting of pain wore away?

CHAPTER II.

THE winter months wore by. Selma's busy life in the rushing city served to divert her thoughts, but her feelings toward Arthur did not change, altho she tried earnestly to forget.

But now, after all her endeavor, Fate strangely interfered. The unlooked-for, the undreamed-of occurred.

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The innocence of Arthur Holmes's mother was suddenly proved and established.

Selma's first intimation of the fact came through a newspaper notice which to her eyes seemed emblazoned in magnified letters.

This is what she read:

A TENNESSEE MYSTERY SOLVED.

After fifteen years of silence, a convict in Dakota confesses on his death-bed to the murder of Mathew Holmes, a crime which at the time led to the most exciting trial and dramatic culmination ever described in fact, or dreamed of in fiction.

The present solution of the long mystery, far from simplifying the affair, adds another wonder to the tale, and causes us to shudder at the possibilities of mistake from circumstantial evidence.

Mathew Holmes was murdered in Kingston, Tenn., Oct. 12, 18—, in the front room of his own home, at six o'clock in the evening. A neighbor, hearing his cry, rushed into the house scarcely two minutes later—and there saw the dying man on the floor and his wife leaning over him, while the weapon (a knife from the supper-table) was near by.

She told an incoherent story of having just come in from the back yard, and, hearing a scuffle in the front room, had rushed forward to interfere between her husband and a strange man whom she did not recognize. Just then her husband reeled and gave a cry, whereupon the stranger clambered out of the open side window.

This was her story; but no one heeded it, because Mathew Holmes, with his dying breath, pointed directly toward her, saying, "There's the one that did it!" He lived only a few moments.

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Margaret Holmes was at once arrested. Her story was investigated somewhat, but no one could testify to having seen any stranger about town. And the dying man's assertion weighed so heavily against her that she was promptly convicted and sentenced to be hanged on the third of June following.

Everything was made ready for the execution, but at the last moment there was a sudden revolution of public feeling in her favor, caused by the touching words of a song which she sang on the gallows platform. Her release was demanded, and she was eventually pardoned by the governor.

In the light of later facts her song seems to have been a direct inspiration, and her escape truly providential.

It now appears that her story was entirely correct. A tramp convict who has lately died in the prison hospital at Yankton, Dakota, leaves a confession to the following effect:

He was wandering through Kingston on the evening of Oct. 12, 18—, when, as he peered in the window of a low frame house, he saw a man counting over some money, which he presently left lying on the table. The would-be robber then slipped in at the window and tried to grab the money; but he was discovered by the owner, and a sharp struggle ensued, in which the latter was stabbed to death with one of his own table-knives. The murderer escaped by the way he had entered, just as a woman rushed in. . . .

It is easy for us now to understand how the dying man in his blind agony did not note this change of persons. He only pointed where his assailant had been, and thereby denounced his own wife.

To Col. Benjamin Ellis, a Chattanooga lawyer, is due the greatest credit in obtaining and verifying this confession before the convict expired.

Margaret Holmes did not live to see her vindication, but

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It comes as a blessing to her son, who expresses himself as eternally indebted to Colonel Ellis for being the means of clearing his mother's name.

As Selma grasped the full meaning of this wondrous news, she was possessed with a glorious, thrilling joy. All the old love and pent-up emotions arose to assert themselves, and her heart throbbed wildly with a supreme gladness.

Then tears filled her eyes as a sense of the injustice under which Arthur had suffered, and which, too, had caused her own sorrow, welled up within her.

She was resolved that nothing should now stand in the way of their happiness. She would write Arthur at once, and explain everything: how she had been forced to leave him, against all the promptings of her own heart, just because of his mother's history.

But it was easier to plan such a letter than to write it. In black and white it looked cold-blooded to connect, however distantly, thoughts of love and thoughts of murder. She wrote and tore up half a dozen letters without sending one. The natural outcome of all this perturbation was the thought of going home herself. Her term of study was nearly over. Why not go now and surprise not only Arthur, but every one?

Selma decided to do this. She packed her trunk that day, and started home the next.

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The journey seemed long, but ever brighter as she neared the state and station where Arthur dwelt. Her heart was bounding with joy as she planned their meeting and words of greeting.

Knoxville was reached at last. Selma attended to her baggage, and then started to walk from the depot home. She tried to be wise and patient. After seeing her mother she would send for Arthur, and he should call that evening. Thus she planned.

But suddenly it occurred to her that her way went past his office. She was in front of the building now. How easy it would be to go in and see him at once! Selma looked at her watch and thought of the long hours she would otherwise have to wait. She was conscious also of appearing well in her new hat and traveling gown. So without further thought she entered.

An office boy came forward to ask her name and whom she wished to see. He caught her answer indistinctly, for the printing-presses were going at full force and made talking difficult; but he understood that she wished to see Mr. Holmes. After a few moments' absence he returned with the request that she follow him.

He led her to the door of one of the various offices and bade her enter.

She was about to do so when her way was intercepted by another young lady who was leaving the office.

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The stranger was well dressed and fine-looking, and especially remarkable for her beautiful flaxen hair. The lady was plainly aware of this distinguishing point of beauty, for she wore at the side of her throat, nestled close to her yellow hair, a big bunch of buttereups. Selma had opportunity to observe all this, for the two women stood facing each other a moment in that awkward uncertainty about the right of way. Then they both smiled, and finally passed each other to the right.

Selma entered the office and the boy closed the door behind her. Mr. Holmes was looking over some papers on his desk, but he presently glanced around, and then jumped up with astonishment. "Selma! you here!" He was surprised into speaking her name with some of the old tenderness. But he quickly recalled himself. "The boy made a mistake in the name. I thought it was one of our contributors."

He spoke rapidly, and seemed somewhat unnerved.

Selma came forward with beaming face and soulful eyes.

"I have come all the way from New York, Arthur, to—see you!" It was not exactly what she had planned to say, but it told a good deal.

Mr. Holmes now spoke more reservedly. "That is kind of you, I am sure; but I am greatly surprised. You must admit that I have had little

SELMA THE SOPRANO

reason to suppose you would ever make so long a journey on my account."

"Oh, Arthur—do not speak so coldly! You don't understand. Wait till I have told you all."

Her heart was beating so fast that she was almost breathless and could not go on; so Arthur again spoke—not unkindly, but sadly.

"When I once, long ago, did commence to address you with a different tone and meaning, you silenced me, Selma, in a letter I have never forgotten. Why are you now surprised?"

"It is not my fault that I sent you that letter." Selma's tones were impressive. "Mama dictated every word. Do you hear this, Arthur? Do you take it all in? You don't know what I have gone through!" She gave him no chance to interrupt. "If you did, you would pity me so! Have you ever suffered—Arthur? Do you know what it is to work, and walk and talk with always one thought in your mind, one pain in your heart; always longing for what might have been, and regretting what you've done?"

Selma hesitated a moment, and then continued:

"Mama would not hear of our being engaged because—you know——"

Arthur finished the sentence for her. "Yes, I know; because of my—mother." He winced visibly under this memory.

Selma hurried on with her words. "But now

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that is all cleared away—I read about it in the paper; and I was so happy I started home by the first train. And, Arthur, here I am!”

She laughed softly, almost hysterically, with the last glad words, and impulsively extended her hand.

Then a great change came over Selma, for Arthur did not respond as she expected.

He was silent a moment, and then spoke deliberately:

“I am sorry, Selma, you have not yet heard that I am—*engaged*!”

Selma stood motionless, hardly comprehending the full meaning of this statement. She seemed as one who tries to think but can not.

“Engaged?” she repeated quietly. “When? how? to whom?”

“To Miss Marion Ellis. She was here a few minutes ago—you probably met her at the door.” Arthur also spoke quietly, but it was a terrible moment for both.

“Miss Ellis?” repeated Selma slowly. “Is she the daughter of that lawyer, Colonel Ellis, who helped you?”

Arthur nodded his head affirmatively.

“And she is the one who passed me at the door?” Selma’s thoughts were coming faster now. “And you have asked her to marry you?” A sudden reckless despair came over Selma. “No, no, I

SELMA THE SOPRANO

don't believe it! You don't mean it, Arthur—do you?"

The rumbling machinery without kept up a strange accompaniment to this climax. Arthur hesitated, but then replied with a calmness he did not feel:

"It is all true—quite true—and therefore this interview can only be painful to both of us. Let me entreat you, Selma, for my sake and your own, to end it."

But Selma was not to be reasoned with just yet. "No, not now—don't send me away like that—it is too terrible!" Her tones had vibrated with intensity, but now they became tremblingly beseeching. "Arthur, does she really love you as I do? And does she sing as I do? You used to love my voice, Arthur—don't you remember?"

Remember, indeed! The voice that still sang in his dreams! But only the pallor of his face revealed the struggle within him as he stepped past her and said:

"I remember all, Selma, and I remember too that I have asked Miss Ellis to be my wife, and that I respect her accordingly. Since you will not leave me, let me be the one to go."

Before he had reached the door Selma was there, barring his way. Her voice was tremulous and husky.

"No, no—I will go, right now; I promise you."

SELMA THE SOPRANO

There was a moment's silence, and still she stood there, supporting herself against the door. Then she seemed to gather her strength and thoughts preparatory to leaving. She passed her hand over her brow, and as she spoke her tones were more calm:

"It is over. Don't feel too badly about me, Arthur, for the pain is no worse than before. . . . There—I am going."

She hesitated again, and then continued rapidly:

"I promise you not to utter another word, or to so much as touch your hand for good-by; but there is one thing I would ask. It is only that you look at me just once *kindly*—as you used to do. Even *she* could not object to this."

This request overcame all his will power. The old sweet tenderness that she had so loved suddenly illumined his saddened face as he impetuously clasped both her hands in his and lingeringly gazed upon her.

True to her promise, she made no motion or sign of entreaty—not even when Arthur fervently exclaimed, in low, broken tones:

"Selma, we have both suffered—haven't we!" The blood rushed to his face as he spoke. He looked in her eyes once again, lovingly, longingly, and then with sudden effort he whispered, "Good-by!"—and left her alone in the room.

Selma did not weep or faint. She just stood

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SELMA THE SOPRANO

there motionless, her hands clasped tightly together. Presently she became conscious of an impressive silence. The machinery had stopped; it was the hour of noon. To Selma it seemed as tho not only the machinery, but her own heart had ceased to throb; all life, the world and the universe, seemed suddenly jostled out of position.

She was looking about her, and thinking: “I must follow again the routine of life. I shall soon open this door and walk out. If I meet any one, I must say ‘Good-morning!’”

She closed her eyes from very weariness at the thought. On reopening them she happened to see a small photograph on Arthur's desk. It was a woman's picture; and as Selma crossed the room for a closer view her surmise was confirmed: it was an admirable and beautiful likeness of Miss Ellis.

Selma took the picture in her hands and looked long at the features. There was a peculiar droop to the eyelids that gave an expression of languor, and was very becoming to Miss Ellis. Yes, she was beautiful! And he had gone to her now—he had chosen between them! Her own picture used to be on this desk. He had often said it inspired him at his work. Now it was this new one that inspired him!

A boundless envy filled for the moment Selma's usually gentle nature, and bitter thoughts floated

SELMA THE SOPRANO

through her brain that frightened her as they passed. In a very frenzy of jealous rage she tore the picture asunder--tore it into fragments, as tho unable to destroy it enough.

Then suddenly all this nervous energy left her, and sinking into a chair, she moaned aloud: "What am I doing, what am I thinking! It is only because I am so wretched, so unhappy!"

Her grief seemed indeed like something pressing down upon her. She bowed her face in her hands, and tried to control and collect her thoughts.

"It was his duty to go; he is engaged to her; and I must bear it. *I must! I must!*"

As the weeks went by, Selma resumed her old life of work and study, and fought her heart's battle as best she could.

Three months later, Arthur Holmes and Marion Ellis were married.

CHAPTER III.

Work always brings its sure but slow reward, and so with Selma each year found her more advanced in her art and more widely recognized as an artist.

Her first season in public was not discouraging, but that is all. The following year she secured a church engagement. But the next winter we find her traveling with a celebrated concert troupe that

SELMA THE SOPRANO

ranked her next in importance to the star. The management were so well satisfied that they re-engaged her the following season.

Five years had passed since the morning of that last interview with the only man she had ever loved. She had not seen him or spoken his name from that day till now, but this was no sign of forgetfulness. With some natures the greater the impression received, the less is the expression given. Selma Marvin had admirers many, but lovers none, tho she could sing a ballad in such a way as to make each individual listener think she was singing to him alone.

It was the 25th of September. They had closed, the night before, a series of three performances in St. Louis, and were to appear in Memphis on the 26th.

The rest of the company had gone on, but Selma remained behind to arrange some personal matters, expecting to take the night train for Memphis.

Selma never forgot that 25th of September. Everything went wrong from morning till night with no let-up. It would be needless to relate all the mishaps that managed to occur during that one day. At the last moment there came an irritating misunderstanding with the hotel clerk, who was not aware that her manager would pay for this extra day. She was obliged to show him her contract and fully explain matters.

SELMA THE SOPRANO

Realizing the necessity of haste, she sent her baggage on and had it checked. But when she at last reached the station the train was just going out of one end as she entered the other.

"A well-rounded day of mishaps," thought Selma, "with a fine crescendo at the end!"

Here she was alone in St. Louis while all her effects were traveling to Memphis. The first and only thing to do was to make inquiries about the next train. The result was not satisfactory: no other train would leave until the next morning.

She was advised to take the night boat; and as this seemed the best plan, she adopted it. Half an hour later Selma was aboard the *Dolly Varden*, which left its dock promptly on time.

She went directly to her stateroom; but having no toilet conveniences, she did not undress, but lay down to sleep as she was.

A street costume is not conducive to childlike slumber, neither is the thumping of a boat's engine. With the two combined it is not strange that Selma tossed and turned and dreamed great dreams in a minute whenever she closed her eyes. Toward three o'clock she awoke. The close atmosphere of the stateroom was stifling.

She threw on her cloak and walked down the hot corridor to the saloon. Here it was not much better, for the lights were burning low and emitting an unpleasant odor of coal-oil.

SELMA THE SOPRANO

Selma went to the gangway, and there breathed freer, for the door above was open. Following her impulse, she mounted the stairs and stepped outside.

The scene about her was a vision of peace. A veil of mellow moonlight enwrapped the sleeping world. The country round was level, and one could see afar white fields and roads and woods, and between them all lay the mighty river, silent and dark and deep. Selma gazed long, and thought of the song, "He giveth His beloved sleep." She turned to descend—but at this moment there was a great cracking, creaking, screeching report. The whole universe seemed to turn over—the stars and moon descended, the river flew upward—and all things hurled, whirled, rushed, and splashed.

Sounds of many voices soon filled the air—swear-words and prayer-words, moans and groans, while over all hung a pall of darkness. The moon had hidden behind a cloud, as tho fearing to look on the scene of terror—the river of Death and night of Eternity.

Selma had been thrown against the ship's railing and was dazed for a moment by the shock. But presently she was conscious of a plunge into darkness, and then of a cold flood that submerged her. She was sinking, floating, drowning, rising—she knew not what. But her strength did not leave, nor her hope of life, and she hardly realized the strange chance that threw in her path a floating

SELMA THE SOPRANO

object, which she succeeded in grasping and climbing upon.

It was not the proverbial broken spar, but one of the long deck-benches, wrenched loose and thrown over by the explosion.

Selma could not see the full outlines of her strange preserver; she could only feel her way along. While reaching out in the water her hand suddenly touched something that sent a chill to her heart. It was another *hand!*—a soft, small hand that immediately clutched her own.

"Oh, help me! Do help me!" pleaded a faint voice near by. At this moment the full moon sailed forth from its cloud-banks and shone upon the woman's face—a face that Selma recognized!

We can not unravel the laws that bring about these coincidences in life—these encounters that seem stranger than fiction and too incredible for belief. Call it fate or call it chance, we only know that this particular event was destined to affect Selma's whole life.

On seeing the face she had given a sudden start, thereby drawing loose from the clutching hand. Then she recalled herself and reached out again; but the treacherous waters had already widened the distance. She could only grasp a few strands of floating hair; but they slipped through her fingers like damp snakes—shimmering, coiling, golden

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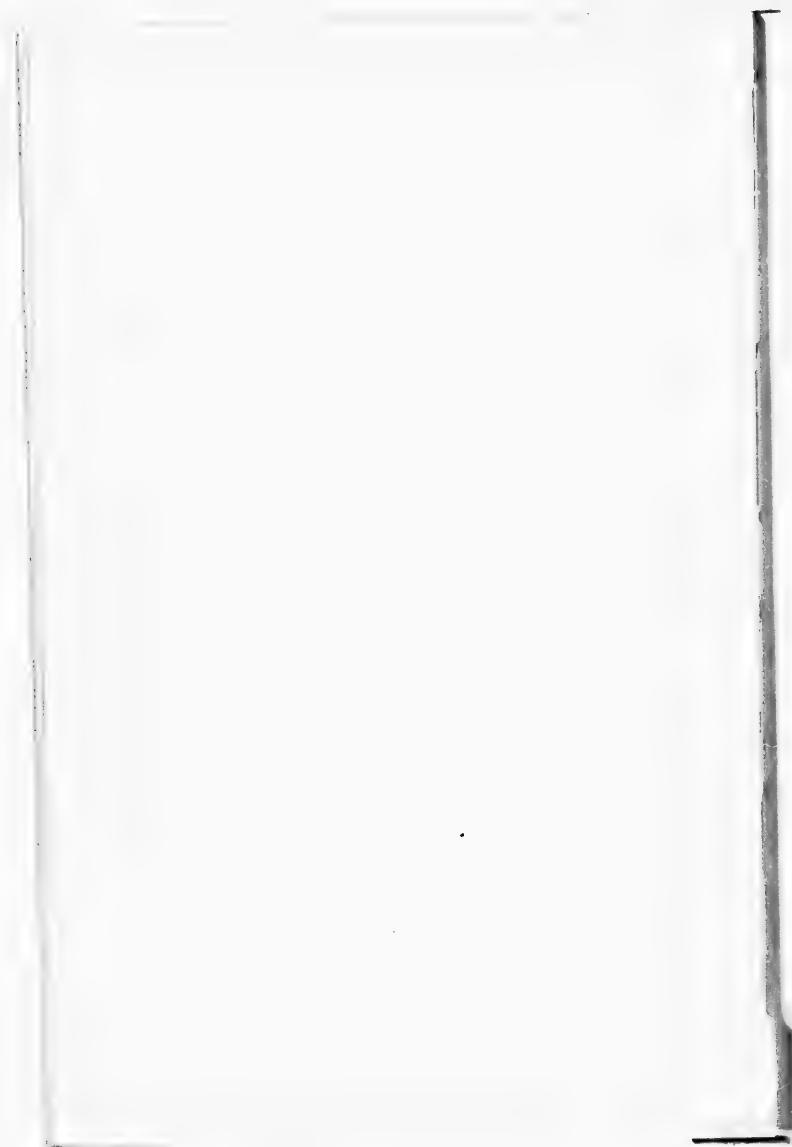
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SELMA THE SOPRANO

snakes: for that hair was yellow—yellow and soft as is seldom seen.

Still clinging to the unsteady bench, Selma watched with dilated eyes the figure carried beyond reach. It sank down, and still she watched the spot, staring as tho she could fathom the dark waters and see the departing soul. Once again that face arose to view, and the moonlight fell upon white lips and drooping eyes surrounded by a halo of gold—the face that Selma could never forget, tho she had seen it but once five years ago—*the wife of Arthur Holmes!*

The waves seemed to caress the body for a moment, and then, like a hungry ogre, the river swallowed its prey.

Selma continued to gaze at the silver-tipped waves; but never again did sun or moon shine upon that face.

In the mean time Selma's bench had struck the river's current and was drifting rapidly. But she paid no heed to this, nor did she feel the chill of the water. She felt only the chill of horror at the vision constantly before her.

"I might have saved her had I not withdrawn my hand"—this was the awful thought that surged in her brain.

She was oblivious to the fact that she still had herself to save.

She was indeed in a state of semi-consciousness

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for some time. Half lying, half clinging upon her wooden support, she never knew how the time passed, or how it happened that in the early morning hours she was found by some fishermen lodged against the posts of a little pier.

They took her to a near country house, where the good wife dried her clothes and revived her with various teas and a brisk rubbing. Being of a naturally strong constitution, the physical ills did not affect her so much as the mental pain. When questioned about the accident she answered evasively; not from any motive, but because the death of Arthur Holmes's wife had almost obliterated her memory of the previous panic.

Selma boarded a passing boat that same afternoon and succeeded in reaching Memphis in time for the night's concert. She told of a delay on the road, but gave no details, and never a mortal suspected that she had taken passage on the *Dolly Varden*, whose terrible fate was the topic of the day. On reading over the death-list, Selma found, as she had expected, the name that was already seared on her heart—"Mrs. Marion Holmes." But that was all. Mr. Holmes's name was among neither the saved nor the drowned. His wife had been traveling alone. Selma did not wonder about it, nor did she read any more. She wished to forget and to keep unknown the fact of her presence

SELMA THE SOPRANO

in the awful scene. Fortunately her own name was not upon the passenger-list.

With burning brow and beating heart Selma sang her part that night. In the crowded hall and the bright gas-light she courtesied and smiled, but in the long, lone night she was crushed and dismayed by haunting, taunting thoughts.

"I envied her once—and now she is dead! She wanted to live! She had hold of my hand—but I drew it back! I can feel the touch yet and can hear her voice! Oh, it is awful—it will kill me!"

Selma was like one who is stricken with terror. She covered her head and scarcely breathed for fear. She tried to think of other things—to recall a strain of music or repeat some verse of a poem. As a result of this effort there rang in her brain again and again—like the chorus of a tragic song—these words by Mrs. Wilcox:

"I hold it true that thoughts are things,
Endowed with bodies, breath, and wings;
And after you have quite forgot
Or all outgrown some vanished thought,
Back to your mind to make its home
A dove or raven it will come."

Selma tossed and moaned as she blamed herself for thinking wrong thoughts once, long ago, when she had looked on that picture of Marion Ellis.

"The raven has now returned to claw and gnaw at my soul! I feel guilty—so guilty!"

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She longed for the day to scatter away these dire dreams of darkness. But with the first glimpse of light her frightened fancy recalled still another verse, long forgotten, about the

"Damp, dull dawn staring in at the pane
Like a dim, drowned face with oozy eyes!"

Whereupon Selma saw in every detail Marion Holmes asleep in the river-bed. "She can never awake," thought Selma, "while I, it seems, can never sleep!"

But she did at last find some repose, and when she awoke in the full daylight the perspective of her mental vision changed. She could think more rationally of her experience. She had never intended any one's death; and furthermore it was not only possible, but probable, that the frail bench could not have upheld two people. This thought was her greatest comfort. She would repeat it to herself over and over, like a spell to ward off frightful memories.

Other scenes and other songs had their effect upon Selma. She was young, successful, and very busy. It is not strange that after a few months her memory of the wreck became buried deep under the tide of life as the boat under river-waters. She never told about it, nor recalled old associations.

SOPRANO

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SELMA THE SOPRANO

CHAPTER IV.

THE winter and the summer passed, and Selma was becoming famous.

She had numerous friends among the profession, and she was always generous with her time and talent. This season a certain well-known journal in New York was giving a series of charitable concerts at Castle Garden. Selma was suddenly called upon to fill a friend's place at one of these concerts. She consented on the shortest notice, barely having time to dress and reach the auditorium.

It was a queer-looking place for a concert; the building seemed better suited for a circus. Flags were hung upon the dingy walls and palms decorated the rude platform. The only means of reaching the temporary dressing-room was by a small projecting stairway at the back of the stage in full view of the audience.

Fully five thousand people were assembled when Selma was directed up these most prominent stairs. Having accomplished the ascent in safety, she was received at the top landing by the press representative. "I believe you are to take Madame Duryea's place?"

Selma raised her eyes in startled surprise. They met the gaze of Arthur Holmes, whose astonishment equaled her own. He extended his hand,

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which trembled at the touch of Selma's nervous, cold fingers.

Thus before five thousand people they met again, and they both recalled that last interview. He had other memories, and so had she; but they spoke no word of the past.

He showed her to the big, barn-like dressing-room, and introduced her to the tenor and the contralto of the evening.

The latter was trying to arrange her hair and complexion before a cracked mirror beside a miserable little smoking lantern, the only illumination to be found.

The concert had begun, and Mr. Holmes was busy here, there, and everywhere.

The dressing-room was a perfect bedlam, for the artists were "trying" their voices, violins, and flutes all at once. The pianist alone bears the distinction of keeping quiet in a dressing-room.

The contralto had her music on her lap and was humming away at her first aria, while a maid was putting on her slippers. The first number did not get an encore, so the contralto had to be hurried off before she was half ready. She went humming and "ahem-ing" all the way to the stage.

When she returned, all hands—voices—flew together to rehearse the "Rigoletto" quartet, while the pianist and violinist were in front. Huddled close to the wretched lamp, these singers worked

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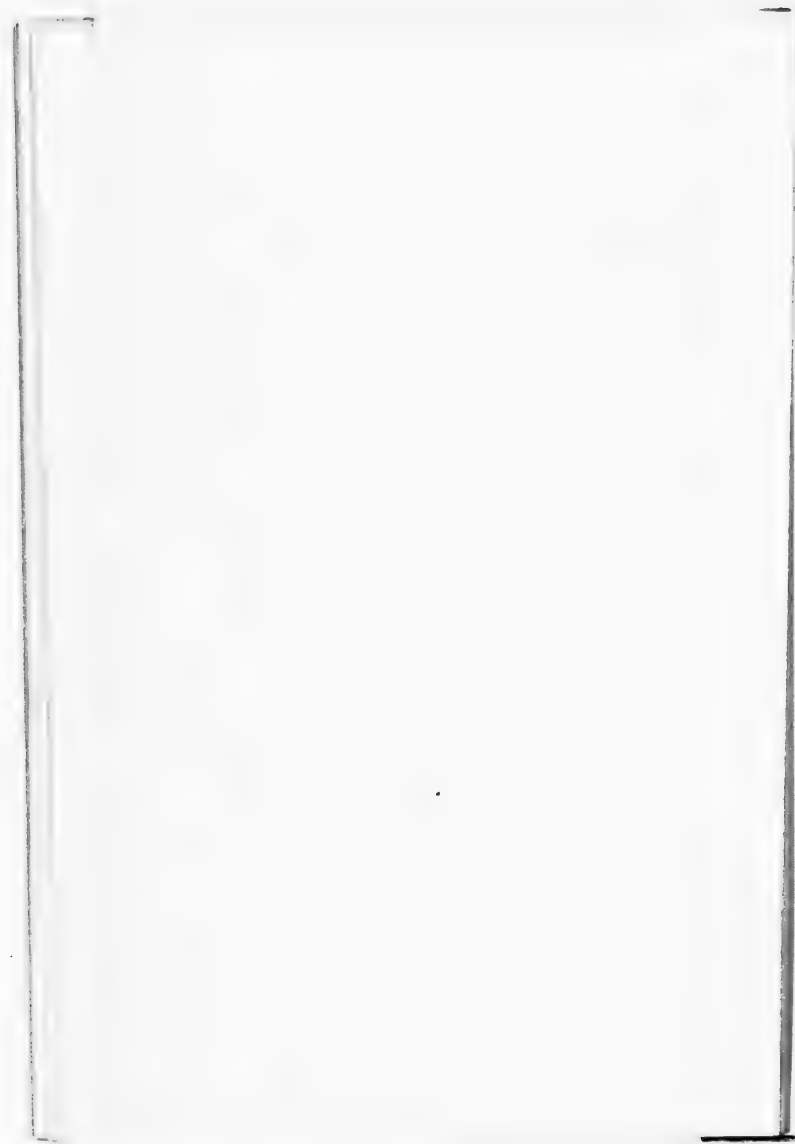
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A strange group.



SELMA THE SOPRANO

hard. The tenor beat time and the baritone held the music.

Just as Selma was clinging desperately to high "A" and the tenor was in the same region, Mr. Holmes rushed in excitedly. "You are practising too loud!" he exclaimed. "They can hear it in front, and the pianist is furious. It's all right when they are clapping, but you must subside between times." But that quartet had to be rehearsed, so they commenced again more softly.

Mr. Holmes made himself useful by holding the lantern over their heads in front of the music. They stood in the middle of the room and formed a strange group—these four musicians singing away all unconscious of the humor of the situation.

The candle cast such grotesque shadows. It threw each singer in a different corner; but nearer to the soprano than any other was the shadow of Arthur Holmes.

Every time there was heard any applause in front, the "Rigoletto" quartet would swell out to a sudden crescendo which lasted with the applause, and then again diminished.

Artists are not always delighted to hear another one encoored, but this queer quartet just laughed with glee when they heard the violinist recalled, for it gave them more time to rehearse.

They hastened over the last page, and then Sel-

SELMA THE SOPRANO

ma had to get ready for her solo, which was the next number.

She smoothed every wrinkle from her gloves, bestowed a final pat to her hair, and then, at the door of the dressing-room, unfastened the fluffy cape that she always wore till the last moment. Mr. Holmes helped her to remove it. As he stood for a moment leaning over her shoulder, both heard the same sound and had the same thought,—the violinist was giving as an encore that sensuous melody of the Carmen, "Habenera,"—the song Selma had sung at their first meeting.

"I have heard it before," murmured Mr. Holmes. "Do *you* remember?"

His voice was so near and so *dear*! It was "Arthur" once again—her first and only love!

She remembered only what he wished her to remember, and forgot for the moment every bitter association that melody might have recalled.

"It was years ago," he continued softly, "but it seems like yesterday. First the 'Habenera,' then the 'Ave Maria,' and then"—his voice sank lower—"and then 'Ich liebe Dich'—Selma!"

Their hands clasped for a moment under the cape; but then she hastened away and stepped before the audience with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, and her heart beating faster than it ever did from stage-fright.

Selma sang her aria well. There was sponta-

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SELMA THE SOPRANO

neous applause, and she came out and bowed. She was called out again, and this time she sat down to the piano.

Selma never planned her encores; better to be disconcerted with an encore than disappointed without one, was her maxim.

But this time she hesitated not a moment in her selection. It was a little German ballad that perhaps few in the audience understood; but the tenderness of her tones was unmistakable; and there was one listener behind the little stage door who understood every word and a great deal more.

It was her answer—"Ich liebe Dich!"

And this was all their courting; or rather it, was the *coda* to a long composition. After working through much *tempo agitato* the original theme had been resumed at last.

But there are other numbers on life's program; the performance is by no means ended.

CHAPTER V

THEY were to be married. Some two weeks before the day, Selma went with Mr. Holmes to visit his little daughter Miriam, of whom he had told her much.

This was the occasion Selma had planned to tell him of her terrible experience on the Mississippi. There had been opportunities before, but she had

SELMA THE SOPRANO

let them pass. He had told of his wife's sad death: how she had started South for her health, but how on the trip she was killed in an accident. On hearing this, Selma had shuddered, her tongue seemed to cleave to her mouth, and she could not speak.

But she was determined not to let this occasion go by. When seeing the child it would be only natural to speak of its mother, and then was the time to confess that she too had been in that river-wreck.

The important moment had arrived. Selma was waiting in the parlor of his sister-in-law's home while Arthur went upstairs for the child.

Presently there was a sound of little footsteps in the hall, and then the parlor door was pushed open by Miriam herself, who had come on ahead of her father.

As the child stood for a moment in the doorway, Selma looked and turned pale. She had prepared herself for a resemblance, but not this—not this! The child was its mother over again: the same shaped face, same drooping blue eyes, and, to crown all, a mass of flaxen hair.

Selma did not speak at first, neither did the child. Miriam was shy, and only sidled over by degrees to the strange lady. Finally Selma touched Miriam's hand and drew her nearer; then the little one looked up.

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SELMA THE SOPRANO

"Are you 'dear Selma'?"

There were tears in Selma's eyes as she embraced the child warmly, and answered: "I hope you will always call me so."

"Papa often talks about 'dear Selma,'" continued the little one.

"And I can tell you he often talks about 'dear Miriam,'" was the hearty response.

Mr. Holmes had now entered the room, and he gazed in silence at the charming picture of his golden-haired baby ensconced on Selma's lap.

She looked up to him with a smile. "You see Miriam and I are already good friends."

The little one now slipped down from her perch and tripped out of the room, evidently bent on some mission of her own.

When she was gone, Arthur drew Selma to his arms, murmuring fondly, "This is the happiest day of my life."

Selma responded to his caress, but she was thinking all the time of her confession. Now was her opportunity. She held his hands in hers and tried to speak quite bravely. But at this moment there were sounds of a tumbling catastrophe in the hall, involving various exclamations from a childish voice. Mr. Holmes and Selma rushed out in alarm, but were soon relieved to find that it was not the child, but only her books, that had fallen.

She was bringing an armful to show the "new

SELMA THE SOPRANO

mama." When her treasures had been rescued she clung to Selma as they reentered the parlor, and again climbed upon her lap.

"Papa says you sing music; won't you sing this?"—and Miriam pointed out a bit of nursery jingle.

Now, strange to say, after years of practise; after successfully appearing before critical audiences with such arias as the Hamlet "Mad Scene" and "Elsa's Dream," Selma found it the greatest difficulty to sing with steady tones—

"Dickery-dickery-dock,
The mouse ran up the clock."

But Miriam was delighted, and wanted to hear the song again. Then she turned to other pieces in the book, and laughed with joy to hear Selma translate the mysterious characters into sweet melody. But none delighted her more than "Dickery-dock," to which she always recurred.

Selma, too, was becoming interested in this nursery nonsense, and the storm in her heart subsided.

They were a happy trio, and she was glad things had turned out so.

Why should she trouble Arthur with sad memories to no purpose? Would it not be selfish on her part to make him share her torturing secret?

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SOPRANO

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SELMA THE SOPRANO

tion: one plies the whip, while the other pulls the reins.

Selma decided to let the "dead past bury its dead."

Two weeks later, Mr. and Mrs. Holmes went to Florida on their wedding-trip, and they remained there the entire season.

Selma had given up her concert work, and the old life seemed so completely cut off that she fancied herself at peace with the past. Her happiness was supreme. Coming home, it was proposed that they travel to New York by water. There was a time when Selma would have opposed such a plan; she had once thought that no power on earth could induce her to again mount the gangplank of a steamer.

But now when Arthur said it was "all right, perfectly safe, and much pleasanter," she thought no more about her former dread until she found herself walking with him arm-in-arm upon the deck of a coast-liner.

They were started on a three-days' voyage, sailing away from the happiest scenes of her life.

But as the dusk of evening fell, and they still promenaded the deck, she suddenly realized that every minute upon this steamer was carrying her spirit to the banks of the Mississippi much faster than to New York.

Selma became more and more pensive. She was

SELMA THE SOPRANO

listening not to her husband's light talk, but to the splashing of the dark waves that seemed to whisper among themselves of a night long ago when they belonged to the mighty river and had not neared the ocean. They whispered of a tragedy: of two women alone together—alone in night and death. "And no one ever told the tale: one of them died, and the other lived; and the living one wedded the dead one's lord.

Alackaday!
It might have been otherwise, we say."

In the gathering gloom a sea-bird screamed, and the waves rolled on with their mocking song.

Selma clasped her hands to her ears with a terrified cry.

"Dearest Selma, what is it!" exclaimed Arthur, holding her in his arms and rubbing her brow. "You tremble and your hands are cold."

"It is nothing," she quickly answered, trying to recover herself. "Only the ship and the ocean;—I don't like the ocean!"

She grasped his arm nervously. "Arthur, tell me; if the ship should go down right now, do you think this bench here would hold both of us if we clung to it in the water;—would it save *both of us*?"

He answered tenderly: "You are nervous, little one. I think we had better go below."

But Selma was not to be put off; her question

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SELMA THE SOPRANO

was more earnest than it seemed. So Arthur finally expressed his opinion thus:

"I really think it would be advisable to engage *two* benches if you contemplate being rescued in that way; and I think you will be doing pretty well to succeed then."

His light answer seemed to touch all the humor in her nature. She laughed until she nearly cried; and then she put her arms about his neck and declared he was so good and kind, and she really did not fear the ocean so very much, and she did not care to go below for a long time. And she thought of so many jokes to tell, and was so witty the rest of the evening, that Arthur declared he wished they could always travel thus.

But that night Selma dreamed a terrible dream. She wept in her sleep till Arthur called to her and asked what was the matter.

"I have had such a dream! I am still afraid. Arthur, you said one bench could not save two people. You did say that—didn't you?"

"Why, I suppose so," he answered, misconstruing her tone. "But if that is what troubles you, I am not sure but one bench *could* save us both, after all. So there, don't worry!"

But Selma groaned; and turning in her berth, she wept silently for hours. She had dreamed a terrible dream.

That voyage left an impress on Selma. For days

SELMA THE SOPRANO

and weeks she was oppressed by an awful sense of guilt. She longed to confide in some one—to hear from other lips that her fault was not so great. But she shrank from confession, for it was a difficult scene to portray. Over and over she planned the words; but they always colored her deed too much one way or the other—too black or too bright—for she knew not herself how wrong or how right she had been.

One sleepless night she softly arose and stole across the hall to the room where Miriam slept. Long she gazed on the fair young face. Then slowly Selma's nervous imagination conjured another form watching beside her: that *other mother* was leaning over the opposite side of the crib, and her sad eyes seemed to say: "This is *my* home, *my* child! You have no right to be here to-night!"

Selma shuddered, and cowered in a big arm-chair, and buried her face in her hands.

But soon little fingers pulled her own away, and a childish voice sounded in her ear: "You are crying—I heard you. Please don't cry!"

Miriam had climbed over on to Selma's lap, and was trying to rub the tears away.

"Please don't cry! Has some one hurt you? Never mind, Miriam loves you."

Selma clasped to her heart the soft, warm form of the child, and she felt suddenly cheered and comforted. A vague, unworded belief that the

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child represented the mother caused Selma to treasure each word of affection as a peace-message from the grave.

"Perhaps you got afraid in the dark?" continued Miriam;—"I often do."

She paused a moment, and then brightened up with an idea.

"It's a good thing to *sing* if you are afraid;—I often do. Let's sing and rock Dickery-dock!"

Miriam at once started off in a high, thin voice on the old ridiculous rime; and it would have been a stubborn soul that could have failed to follow her example. Selma wrapped a big shawl around them, and there in the gray dawn they rocked and sang together. They both enjoyed the song, and they both fell asleep.

Thus did Miriam ever and again unconsciously quiet the riot of accusing conscience.

CHAPTER VI.

THE months and years rolled by. Selma was devoted to Miriam, and the child seemed equally attached to Selma.

They walked and talked together, they played together and studied music together, and they laughed and sang at all hours of the day. Mr. Holmes was often congratulated upon his happy, ideal home.

No pains were spared on Miriam's training; and

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indeed, Selma was strangely particular on some points, as the following instance will show.

Once when Miriam was quite a girl she came home from school with an unusual amount of vehemence to her opening and shutting of the door, a suspicious flinging down of hat and books; and then, rushing to the piano, she landed with fire and fury on the first chord of Chopin's Revolutionary Etude. She dashed down the opening passage, mutilated the notes at the end, and tore the *tempo* to tatters.

It was not long before Selma entered the parlor to interfere.

"Do not vent your temper on the divine art, Miriam—it is little less than blasphemy."

Whereupon Miriam turned round, with flushed face and tear-choked voice:

"Oh, it isn't the music I am mad at—it's a girl in my class! I hate her—I just hate her!"

Selma suddenly spoke up with tones intense:

"Miriam, never let hatred find room in your heart. If another has done you harm, you but do yourself more by harboring such an emotion."

But Miriam was not so easily diverted from her wrongs. She still protested that the girl in question was mean and unbearable.

"But, my child, don't you see that by allowing yourself to hate in return you are at once as bad as she? And furthermore, you dare not indulge in

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such thoughts because of the suffering it may bring upon you. Suppose the girl you hate should die! Ah, Miriam, you never want that experience—to know that a soul beyond the grave has such a score against you!"

Miriam was now listening, overawed by Selma's strange vehemence; and the latter, as she spoke, was looking at Miriam sadly and steadily, tho she seemed to see beyond.

"You would find her face peering at you in every book you read, in every picture on the wall, and every ember on the hearth. On every side you would meet some reminder of the past—a look, a word, a song, a flower or its perfume—and you would trace some resemblance in every passing face. Believe me, Miriam, you can't afford to hate any living creature—not for the smallest space of time."

Selma put her arm about Miriam's neck.

"Now, my little girl, go on practising your Revolutionary Etude, but let it express a revolution of your feelings. Make it a proclamation of victory, instead of a war-cry."

Miriam turned again to the keyboard and played more carefully, following the melody as Selma sang it. The young girl was soon impressed that music and anger do not go together.

It was about this time that Mr. Holmes accepted the position of foreign correspondent to the New

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York paper with which he had long been connected.

"A sojourn abroad will do you good," he gladly announced to Selma. "You need a change, my dear, for you often look pale and tired. And besides, you can study more there—and Miriam, too, as we often have planned."

Selma was delighted to hear this. She impulsively kissed him, and fondly exclaimed:

"I am happy with you anywhere; but it will be perfectly inspiring to live in Europe. We will leave America and all our cares behind. I am going to forget everything but you, and Miriam, and music!"

Selma had often wished to give Miriam the advantages of Europe, and to study there herself. Her own voice had not been neglected all these years; in fact, it had improved, and she was often advised to work for grand opera. Mr. Holmes, too, was proud of her voice, and urged her to make the most of it. So it was arranged that Selma and Miriam should study in Rome while Mr. Holmes traveled about as his work required, returning to see them as often as possible.

Miriam was now fifteen years old, the living picture of her mother, a perpetual pain yet indispensable solace to Selma. The life and work in Rome proved to be all and more than they had hoped for. It was exhilarating. Miriam was

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enthusiastic about her lessons with Sgambati, and Selma found a strange delight in the dramatic side of her art.

They were living in the via Margherita, on the fifth floor of an old palazzo that was now given over to students of all kinds. The family of whom they rented rooms were artists every one of them, from the father on down to the youngest daughter. In the room next to Selma was a French girl learning the mandolin; above, were sounds of an organ; on the first floor was a sculptor's studio: hard workers all; unknown as yet, but hoping each one to thrill the world some day.

One evening after a day of hard practise, Selma and Miriam were sitting in their room. They were tired and absolutely quiet—a rare occurrence; for between singing, declamation, and piano-practise their room was one of the noisiest in the house.

But to-night they were resting. The window was open, and presently, from below, or above, or next door, they heard a piano. At first they paid little heed; but soon Selma looked at Miriam and Miriam answered back, "It is beautiful!"

The player was not an artist; he stumbled over the scales, and his arpeggios were execrable; but the music he played was what astonished them.

"Did you ever hear it before?" asked Miriam; and Selma said:

"No. It is as different from Wagner as it is

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from Rossini. I can't place it. But how beautiful! There, that melody! Oh, it makes one want to cry!"

They listened on, and Selma was affected as never before by the power of music.

There were such strange modulations, such mad, weird themes. Long after the playing ceased those melodies sang in her brain, and the next day they still clung to her.

She was unconsciously humming one on her way down those dreary five flights of stairs.

"You are singing my music! Where did you get it?" suddenly inquired a voice behind her.

Selma looked up and saw a pale, thin, eager-eyed young man, who from his speech was American, tho his features were Italian.

"I suppose I heard you playing it. Are you the composer? You played like one—bad technique, good touch. But your music is wonderful."

"Yes, I know," he answered naturally. "But tell me, are you the soprano upstairs? You disturb me awfully, but I like your voice. Are you studying for opera?"

"Yes, of course. Don't you hear me falling on the floor when I practise dying and fainting?"

"That is so. I often wondered what was the matter up there, but never thought anything so tragic. I should think my opera would suit you."

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SELMA THE SOPRANO

It has one death by apoplexy, one by drowning, and two suicides!"

Selma laughed. "That sounds attractive, and it is in my line. Bring it up sometime, if you like."

"All right. Good-day." He went to his work, and she to hers. They were both earnest and busy, and never noticed the unconventionality or terseness of their speech.

That evening the composer carried his precious portfolio to the floor above, and, ringing the bell, inquired for "the soprano."

It was the first call Selma and Miriam had received, and when the landlady announced a visitor they exclaimed at once: "Oh, yes—the composer!"

Both were delighted at the prospect of hearing that wonderful music, and the composer was equally delighted to have a sympathetic audience. But before playing he had to explain his music.

"I have based my libretto on Zola's novel, 'Thérèse Raquin,'" he said. "You have never read it? Oh, I am sorry! Well, I must tell it to you. It is very intense and terrible, but that is why I like it; tame plots require tame music, and comedy in music is something for which I have no sympathy."

Selma agreed with him on this point; light music never appealed to her.

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The two women were seated in attentive attitudes on either side of the piano, while the composer stationed on the stool proceeded to tell his story.

"To put it concisely, the main idea of Zola's plot is this: A couple love each other, but one is already married. This obstacle to their union is disposed of by drowning. The victim's death is supposed to be accidental, but in point of fact it was murder, and the heroine herself had a hand in it. The lovers are afterward married, and the strength of the opera lies in the mental suffering of Thérèse, who is continually haunted by visions of the dead."

"Well, I should think she would be!" exclaimed Miriam; and then, glancing toward Selma, who had not spoken, she jumped up with a cry of surprise.

Selma had fainted! Miriam rushed to the next room for water; but when she returned, Selma had already opened her eyes. A fainting spell usually leaves one half hysterical. Selma was smiling and sobbing at the same time. She suddenly turned toward the composer, who still sat on the piano-stool, too astonished and frightened to do anything.

"I don't like your opera—take it away!" Selma's eyes sparkled, and she spoke excitedly. "It is horrible! You degrade music by adapting it to such emotions. I am sorry I ever heard it. I hope it will never succeed!"

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This was too much. The young man gathered up his portfolio.

"As my work has no probability of a public hearing, your good wishes can be dispensed with! I bid you good-evening."

He went out of the room faster than he came in.

"Dear Selma, why did you speak so? You made him very angry."

"Is that so? Well, I am sorry. But I am so tired!"

Selma was nervous and feverish, so Miriam said no more about the matter.

The next morning Selma seemed herself again.

"I must apologize to that composer the next time I meet him. To discourage an earnest musician is little less than a crime. I am ashamed of myself."

Miriam was pleased by this announcement, and she settled down to her work composedly while Selma went out.

Selma's ostensible errand was to the bank, but this was not the direction she gave the cab-driver. He was ordered to "St. Peter's."

A wild determination had settled upon Selma during the previous night, for the composer's story had pierced her soul like a doomsday call, and she could not bear her secret longer.

Selma entered the doors of St. Peter's and hastened down the vast nave—past pillars and pic-

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tures and chapels of stone; past mosaics that glistened and marble that shone; past relics of saints and tombs of the dead; past low-burning tapers and pale lights o'erhead; past people that prayed and others that stayed to gaze on the beauties around them.

It is a long journey from the entrance of St. Peter's to its transept. But it was not to see or to listen that Selma this morning hurried on—it was to *speak*. She had often been here, and had noted on the left-hand side a semi-circle of curtained retreats. They are the confessionals for all nations.

Selma knew nothing of the Roman Church save the vague and consoling idea that in the confessional you can tell your troubles to a wise and willing listener who will counsel, but not betray.

With the courage of despair, Selma stepped under the curtain that bore the comforting word of welcome—"English."

Still more despairing she came out. The place was vacant, and Selma was too weary and heart-sick to make any further attempt or inquiries.

She leaned languidly against the balustrade of the great high altar.

"I must struggle on," she was thinking, "and smile with the living while haunted by the dead. No peace, no help, no sympathy!"

She mused on for some moments, and a terrified

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expression passed over her face as she thought again of "Thérèse Raquin."

Why must she needs encounter this story, so like her own, here far from home, where she was so happy and working so earnestly to forget the past! Truly, fate seemed hard against her.

The high-niched saints and painted madonnas had seldom looked down upon a more wretched woman than was Selma at that moment. Miserably and appealingly she glanced about her as a consciousness of the surrounding glories came upon her.

At this moment there was a mighty reverberation, a throb as of human hearts, and then one resounding chord of music like a trumpet-blast from heaven. It was the organ of St. Peter's.

As the tremendous harmonies rolled on they brought Selma to her knees and tears to her eyes. The organist was voicing grandly a fugue on a well-known theme, the Aria from "Stradella." The glorious tune kept working its way through tremolos, chords, and thirds; sometimes accompanied and sometimes alone, in major and minor and all possible keys. Now high and now low, now fast and now slow, it soared from all parts of the organ like a prayer from all parts of the earth.

When Selma finally emerged from St. Peter's the violence of her emotions had been conquered, and a new purpose shone in her face.

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It seemed to have been revealed to her that fate had thrown this strange opera in her path; but it was meant as a guiding torch instead of a destroying brand. The composer was evidently poor and discouraged. It was plainly intended that she should help him to prominence; for no one on earth could portray the character of "Thérèse Raquin" *so well as she*.

So Selma, always quick in decision and impulsive in action, stopped at the floor below their own in the old palazzo of the via Margherita.

"I wish to speak with the young American composer," she told the landlady who opened the door.

The young man arose from his work and came forward with very bad grace. He paid little attention to Selma's apologies about the evening before, but began to look at her curiously when she asked for the loan of his manuscript.

"You know I am studying for grand opera, and intend to make my début before returning to America. Now if you will allow me to study the score, and the music seems suited to my voice, I shall be pleased to create the rôle of Thérèse Raquin."

The composer was thoughtful for a moment. He evidently regarded Selma as a very eccentric and troublesome neighbor. At last he spoke up firmly: "I may as well tell you, madam, that I have already submitted my opera to every manager

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Selma waived this objection aside.

"We can discuss that part afterward. If you
do not wish to let the whole manuscript go out of
your hands, give me only a part, and I will learn
it by to-morrow evening. You can come up then,
and we will have a rehearsal."

Her surmise was correct; he hesitated to give
up his precious manuscript to this strange woman.
He entertained some fears that she might take a
second sudden dislike to it. Selma continued:

"Let me try one of the scenes you referred to,
where Thérèse is haunted by a vision of the dead
wife."

"Dead wife?—dead *husband*, you mean," qui-
etly corrected the composer.

Selma gave a little start of surprise. "Then it
was not the *man's wife* that was drowned?"

With a sort of nervous inspiration she quickly
tried to explain. "I suppose I thought it was
so — because — perhaps — the vision of a woman
seemed more beautiful—more artistic than that of
a man."

The composer looked up and spoke with anima-
tion.

"It *is* more artistic. You are quite right—you
have given me an idea. There is no reason why I
can't reverse those characters! I certainly shall

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do so. Here is the scene you asked for; take it and try it. And please change the pronouns when you sing it so as to have a feminine phantom."

Selma took the manuscript, and the composer watched it with some misgivings, tucked under her arm and carried upstairs.

But it was reassuring to hear the piano above soon responding to those beloved harmonies.

The composer went through some strange contortions all by himself in the room below. Being in manuscript and not overplain, the work of deciphering did not go so smoothly as he could have wished. With every false note or hesitancy in the rhythm this unknown genius would writhe and groan, but with every phrase of beauty he would beam ecstatically.

But composers are apt to be unreasonable, and so with this young enthusiast. On hearing for the second time a sixteenth note where he expected a thirty-second, he grabbed up his hat and rushed out of the house, declaring he could not stay and hear his music murdered.

He did not go home until night, and the next day he also stayed away.

That evening he climbed upstairs with many misgivings. He rang the bell of the étage above and asked once again for "the soprano."

Selma and Miriam received him at the door. They both were enthusiastic about his music.

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"Let us begin at once," said Selma. "Miriam is the orchestra and you are the audience. Please sit over there on the trunk or the steamer-chair. Now, Miriam, begin."

"Hold on!" cried the composer. "You must explain your stage-setting. If this is the vision-scene, where is the vision?"

"Oh, I will turn toward the window, or anywhere; it matters not where I look, I shall see the ghost of the murdered woman."

Selma spoke fast and recklessly. "I shall see her beautiful pale face and golden hair. Oh, have no fear, I can easily imagine that part!"

Selma's breath came fast and her eyes shone like burning coals; but the composer did not heed—he had too many ideas of his own.

"I won't have a *blond* ghost!" he suddenly exclaimed. "The vision must be beautiful, but *not blond*."

"And why not?" asked Miriam and Selma together.

"Simply because the blond type is not tragic. The audience would admire, but not be thrilled; we must have a brunette ghost!"

"Well, all right. I can imagine it, anyway. Now I am ready to begin. I am supposed to have on my bridal robes, and am in my own room. Miriam, start up the orchestra."

The composer began beating the *tempo*, but he

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soon stopped, and Miriam also turned round from the piano, amazed at Selma's performance

The singer did not miss the accompaniment. Her pure, full voice rendered without effort the new and difficult music. But it was the wonderful expression—the passion, pathos, pain, and power of her acting—that most astounded. The meaning of every word was driven deep in the hearts of her hearers—

"The guests are waiting, and I can hear
The sound of music and festive cheer;
But this day that I longed for brings me pain,
For I think of the past and the dead again."

The wretched heroine of the opera recalls with fearful minuteness the scene and details of the murder; how the drowning woman "desperately tried to grasp and cling to my hand!"

There is an appalling hush after this crescendo; then in sweet, faint tones, like a voice from the past, Thérèse remembers—

"The ensuing silence
Of the warm summer night,
The sweet-smelling flowers,
And the bright moonlight."

Very grandly had the composer accomplished his task. The agony of conscience was depicted by a chromatic theme of peculiar rhythm, while beneath in the orchestra were to be heard distant strains of a wedding-dance.

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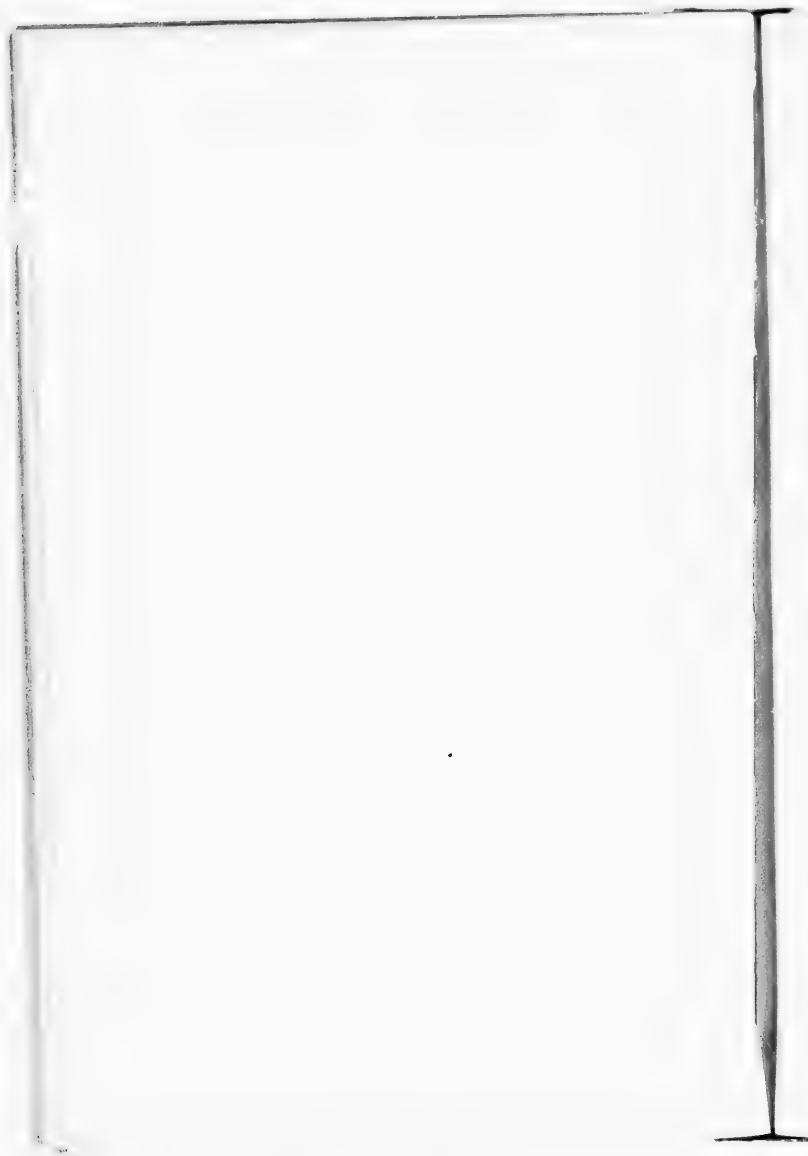
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SELMA THE SOPRANO

Thérèse turns to meet her newly wed lover, but is confronted, instead, by a vision of the dead wife.

With a shriek like a tortured soul of the inferno, Selma fell, limp and artistically.

She quickly arose.

"How is it? Will I do?" The composer was wiping his eyes, and laughing and singing and clapping his hands all at once. "You are Thérèse herself—my very own Thérèse! Oh, my opera is a success! All the world shall hear it. I will borrow money, sell my library, work, steel—anything to bring it out! And then I shall be great; it will all come back to me. Oh, you are wonderful—you have saved me! You don't know how delighted I am. This is the happiest day of my life!"

CHAPTER VII.

SELMA could not wait to write the news to Mr. Holmes, who was then in Constantinople, but telegraphed at once:

"Have found wonderful new opera. Great rôle. Will début in the fall. Do come back soon."

Professional musicians will doubtless smile at the assurance and the unprecedented manner with which this composer and singer went to work. But it must be borne in mind that they were both

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conscious of genuine merit, both willing to risk anything, and both in a measure desperate.

Selma advanced two thirds of the money, and the composer borrowed the rest. The expenses were not so great as might be supposed, the house and orchestra being the chief items. The composer was to be music director and stage manager. No chorus was required, and the scenery was commonplace. A celebrated tenor was engaged upon a profit-sharing contract. All summer the work went on.

Mr. Holmes arrived some weeks before the important date, and, being himself a journalist, he lost no time in visiting the critics and attending to all the announcements — the placards, posters, programs, librettos, tickets, and advertising. He became in fact a general manager both on and off the stage.

The composer burned many a candle low while designing costumes and stage settings, and Selma studied to the limit of her strength. Her thoughts were always with the opera, and she hardly knew when she was Thérèse and when herself. Sometimes the mournful conclusion would settle upon her that there was very little difference between her own life and the story of the opera. Then again she would think quite otherwise, and would feel light-hearted, and believe that in portraying this character she was doing penance for a guilt that was purely imaginary.

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SELMA THE SOPRANO

Rehearsals progressed satisfactorily, at least to the parties most concerned. The supernumeraries were in a constant state of turmoil over the composer's strange directions and indomitable will.

We have mentioned before that the services of a professional stage manager were dispensed with. This was not so much from economy as necessity, for it was soon evident that no one would or could meet the demands of this most erratic composer.

The final rehearsal went without a hitch. The orchestra was well drilled and the ensembles were perfect. Miriam served as Selma's maid and an all-round convenience. She was as excited and interested in all preparations as if the whole affair rested upon her shoulders.

The night of the performance arrived. Selma found herself in good voice, and she looked unusually handsome, altho worn a little thin by her long work.

After seeing Selma and Miriam to their dressing-room, Mr. Holmes hastened to his managerial duties.

Selma was soon arrayed in her costume, and she told Miriam to go and help the others. As Miriam reached the door, Selma suddenly rushed forward and embraced her, exclaiming brightly: "You must wish me success." Miriam responded heartily. "I know your success is certain; your voice is so pure and so sure, and you look so beautiful to-

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night—perfectly lovely! I can hardly stop looking at you!”

Whereupon Selma laughed and warbled, and threw kisses to Miriam from the dressing-room door.

The opera of “Thérèse Raquin” opens with the scene of the murder. The distant cry of a woman’s voice, somewhat resembling Wagner’s shriek of the Walküre, forms the first vocal music of the opera. The curtain rises upon a moonlit scene at the bank of a stream, and the orchestra proceeds to weave out strange, moaning harmonies—the cry of a river-bird and the splashing of waves. Presently a boat touches shore, and a man and a woman climbs out. They are pale and fearful. It is Thérèse Raquin and her lover. Their opening duet is mysterious and uncanny, but at last it swell out into defiant harmonies indicative of their determination to brave the consequences of their deed. Then follows the entrance of the victim’s old mother, who has come in search of the tardy excursionists. The guilty couple carefully and dramatically explain to her how they all came near being drowned; how they tried to save the poor wife, but in vain. The mother, at first stunned by the terrible account, begins to doubt their tale, and she finally hurls maledictions upon them. She accuses them of killing her daughter; she cries out for help, and would denounce them,

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SELMA THE SOPRANO

but the excitement overcomes her, and she falls down in a fit of apoplexy. When assistance comes she tries to speak, but can not. The curtain descends.

This first act was received enthusiastically. Even the musicians in the orchestra applauded. The contrabassist nodded his head to the drummer, exclaiming: "Very good, very good! The soprano has talent and originality." The musicians left their instruments and went back under the stage during the interim. There all was bustle and hurry in preparing for the second act—the "vision scene."

Selma was again ready before the stage-setting, so Miriam went over to Mr. Holmes, who was busy arranging the "vision."

The lights and final touches were being bestowed. The dark-eyed, finely proportioned figurante stepped into her place to represent the ghost, murmuring, as she did so, that her eyes were nearly blind from a headache. She had barely taken her position and arranged her long black hair artistically when she toppled over in a faint.

They carried her off with scant sympathy, for there was too much concern about the "vision." It must soon be mounted, for the act had already commenced. Selma's voice could be heard soaring out in her great solo like a bird on the wing.

"Quick, there! Who will do to fill this place?"

SELMA THE SOPRANO

cried Mr. Holmes in despair, as he heard that solo steadily nearing the end.

"I can do it, papa! I have seen it so often, I know the pose."

Mr. Holmes wasted no words. He hurried Miriam into the costume, and powdered her face at the same time. Then every one in the vicinity had a hand in trying to fit the black wig over Miriam's hair.

But her golden locks were too abundant and silky; the wig would fall off.

"Well, it can't be helped!" exclaimed Mr. Holmes. "Just let down your own hair; the composer will have to be satisfied with a *blond* ghost, after all!"

Miriam hurried into place. She threw back her head, clasped her hands rigidly, and half closed her eyes as the stage moonlight was thrown upon her white face—the face of her dead mother!

"Too bad we can't notify Selma of the change," thought Mr. Holmes.

Soon the signal was given, and the "apparition" slowly rose to view on the stage. The contrabassist and drummer were watching from the orchestra as the soprano turned toward the "phantom." They saw her give a sudden gasp, and then pass her hands before her as tho to dispel the illusion. She looked up once again, trembling in every muscle; her lips moved as tho to speak,

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* "The contrabassist and drummer were watching from the orchestra."

SELMA THE SOPRANO

but no sound escaped them. Suddenly she threw up her arms and fell prone upon the floor.

As the curtain descended the drummer shrugged his shoulders. "Overdone!" he exclaimed. "In striving to be original she has been unnatural. Why didn't she scream properly and fall artistically?"

They again left their instruments and went back of the curtain.

As they reached the scene they saw Mr. Holmes step up to the fallen prima donna and take her hand to assist her in rising.

They saw him suddenly drop the hand and frantically turn her face toward him. Then he staggered back with a cry of horror.

Selma the Soprano was dead!

At the End of
His Rope

By
Florence M. Kingsley

Illustrations
By
C. H. Warren

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

PART I.

MR. PERCY ALGERNON SMITH, familiarly known as "Cinnamon" Smith, thrust his hands deeper into his trousers pockets. "I am not going," he remarked with an air of decision.

"Not going!" cried the joint proprietors of Lone Pine Camp in a chorus. "Not going! Why?"

Mr. Smith vouchsafed no immediate reply; he had fixed an experienced eye upon the coffee-pot, which at the moment threatened to inundate the camp-fire with its furious contents. "Here you, Jake," he said peremptorily; "the coffee's boiling over!"

The campers at Lone Pine were on the point of starting out for an all-day's fishing excursion up Sunday brook. It may as well be explained right here that the party consisted of four undergraduates of C—— University who were temporarily pursuing their education in the bracing air of the Adirondacks.

That these young gentlemen were thus studi-

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

ously engaged during that portion of the year commonly exempt from mental pursuits, argues nothing. Great minds have ever been remarkable for concentration of purpose; and everybody knows that the late football, rowing, and bicycle seasons were of unusual and engrossing interest. It is to be hoped that a future and more enlightened generation will so arrange the dull and comparatively unimportant scholastic pursuits that they shall not clash with live interests. In a word—to quote from their own forceful, if inelegant phraseology—Messrs. “Cinnamon” Smith, “Piggy” Brewster, “Herodotus” Jones, and “Tommy” Pettigrew had been “plucked” in their examinations, and were now “cramming” with more or less enthusiasm and diligence under the able direction of Prof. John Gearing.

Mr. Smith’s announcement occasioned considerable badinage of a personal and even damaging nature, all of which was received by that young man with commendable stoicism and equanimity.

“Cin’s lazy!” drawled “Piggy” Brewster, as he ensconced himself comfortably in the stern of the boat, armed with the lightest paddle.

“Cinnamon’s going to write to his best girl!” shouted Herodotus Jones, shying a mighty quid of spruce-gum at the auburn head of the young gentleman on the shore. “Do it in poetry on birch-bark, old boy! Little wavelets a-kissin’ the beach; green

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AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

leaves all whisperin' of thee; my heart a-tremblin'
with rapture at the call of the lone loon across the
moonlit waters! Hey, Cin?"

"Aw—get along with you!" growled the recip-
ient of these graceful sallies. "I'm going to bone
all day on Greek—that's what I'm going to do."

A burst of derisive laughter greeted this saying.
Then the boat shot out into the sparkling waters of
Beaver lake, and speedily disappeared behind the
wooded island.

Left to himself, it appeared that Mr. Smith had
not remained behind to indulge in solitary ease,
for no sooner did the last echo of oars and voices
die away than he fell to work with extraordinary
energy and diligence. He swept out the camp—
being not over-particular as to corners—gathering
in the process a goodly heap of bacon-rinds, egg-
shells, corn paper, and tin cans, which he bestowed
in the bushes. A motley array of old shoes of
various sizes, four and one-half pairs of ragged
socks, a nondescript assortment of parti-colored
garments in various stages of dilapidation were
retired, in company with the camp frying-pan, to
a dark corner under the bunks, this position being
further defended by an artistic arrangement of bal-
sam boughs. As a finishing touch, two pairs of
muddy trousers, a half-emptied tin of condensed
milk—to the wrath and discomfiture of an indus-
trious swarm of Adirondack flies—and three dog-

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

pared novels followed the bacon-rinds into the comfortable obscurity of the hucklebery-bushes.

Mr. Smith paused long enough to wipe his heated brow. "It looks pretty slick," he murmured approvingly. "And now for the grub; girls are always hungry."

A rapid but thoughtful investigation of the camp cupboard ensued, with the following-named results: item—two small and somewhat wizened lemons; item—one damp and dubious paper bag, containing ginger-snaps minus the snap; item—one box of marshmallows.

"The lemonade'll be on the Sunday-school-picnic order," meditated the youth, as he surveyed these tempting articles with a doubtful grimace; "and the less said about the snaps the better; but they'll cotton to the marshmallows all right.—Jerusalem crickets! there they are now, t'other side of the lake, and I haven't even washed my hands!"

Exactly seven minutes later, Mr. Percy Algeron Smith, arrayed in a golf suit of the latest fashionable cut and an immaculate flannel shirt, set off by a necktie of flaming red—which, he flattered himself, subdued the tint of his auburn locks to a positive brown—sauntered jauntily down to the boat-landing.

"How de do, Miss Daisy! (Jove, but she's a stunner, and no mistake!) Glad to see you, Miss Terrill! Won't you come ashore?"

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AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

The elder of the two young persons in the boat hesitated; but the one addressed as Miss Daisy was on her feet in a twinkling.

"Just for an instant, Kate!" she said deprecatingly. "What a *sweet* place for a camp—ours isn't nearly so pretty!—Lemonade?" went on this sprightly damsel, fanning her flushed face with a big green fan; "yes, indeed, and it's awfully kind of you to think of it, Mr. Smith! Aren't you thirsty, Kate?"

The person addressed as Kate looked about her tentatively. "It certainly is a very pretty place," she said sedately; "but we ought not to stop, Margaret."

"The fellows are all off on the trail to Sunday brook," remarked the astute Mr. Smith, setting out three glasses on the pine board which did duty as a table. "They won't be back before evening. The old man's out bug-hunting."

"Who is the old man?" cried Miss Margaret with an irrelevant gurgle of laughter. "And bug-hunting—ugh! Who ever heard of such a thing!"

"Oh, I mean Gearing! He's bossing the cramming for exams," replied Mr. Smith with elegant brevity. "Two lumps of sugar, or three, Miss Daisy?"

"Three, please. Is he married?"

"Married! Who—the old man? Ha! ha!—that's a good one! Why, Miss Daisy, Gearing

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

never even looks at anything but books and bugs, and is more afraid of a pretty girl than he'd be of a boa constrictor!"

"The idea! How funny! Kate, do look at that big spool up there on the tree! What is that for, Mr. Smith?"

"That spool? Aw—that's another of Gearing's notions. He likes to get off all by himself after his bugs—don't want even a guide along to bother him. So he ties up one end of a string in camp and unwinds a monstrous spool as he goes along. When he gets through with his investigations he winds up, and the string brings him into camp again as right as a trivet. See?"

"The very idea!"

"Bright man!" chorused the fair voyagers.

"His spools hold a mile of string, and he generally carries his pockets full of 'em," pursued Mr. Smith, gallantly presenting a toasted marshmallow to each of his guests. "You can bet the fellows don't raise many objections to his travels!—I say, Miss Margaret," he added guilelessly, "don't you want some pink water-lilies? I know where there's a grist of 'em,—beauties too."

"You go, Margaret," said Miss Terrill indulgently; "I'll stop here and rest. I'm too deliciously comfortable to move."

And producing a volume from the pocket of her jacket, the young lady settled back in her luxu-

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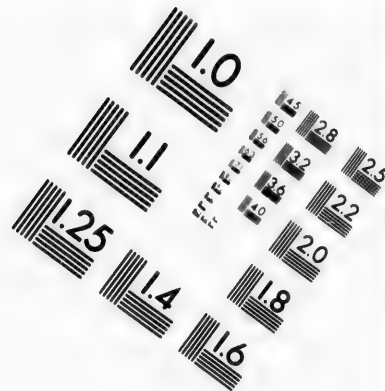
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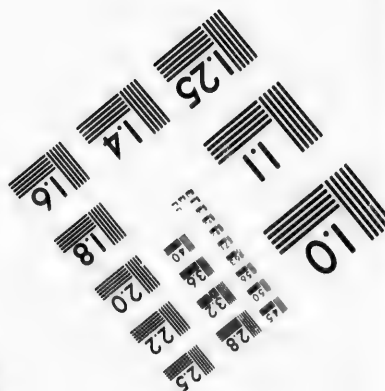
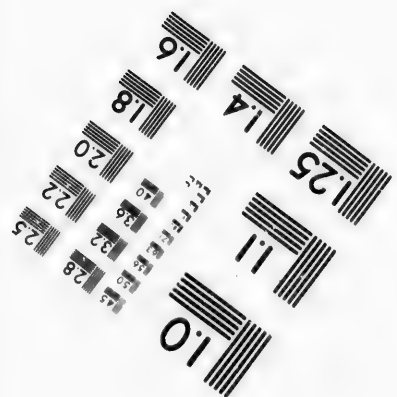
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AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

rious chair—cunningly fashioned out of a barrel and a piece of burlap—with the air of an experienced chaperone.

Before proceeding further with this narrative, it must be distinctly understood that Miss Katherine Terrill was a young person in whose veins ran certain saving streams of genuine blue blood. Not only was she a colonial dame by virtue of both lines of descent, but through her maternal grandmother she was still further linked with greatness in a manner which defied question.

To quote the often-repeated admonition of Madam Carter Stockard herself, "You must never forget, my dear Katherine, what your position as a descendant of Col. Brayton Carter, of Virginia, implies."

"I should require a memory as long as that of Methuselah, dear grandmama, if I remembered all that it implies," was the somewhat flippant answer.

"I am grieved and astonished, my dear Katherine," once remarked Miss Penelope Scidmore, principal of the Scidmore Select School for Young Ladies, "to learn that *you*, a young person of the most admirable birth and breeding, should for one moment have countenanced such a breach of the proprieties!" Miss Scidmore had made the painful discovery that certain of her "select" young ladies, under the leadership of Miss Terrill, had walked out of the protecting walls of the S. S.

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

S. Y. L. *without a chaperone*; and that, thus alone and unprotected, they had pressed into service a team of horses and an empty hay-wagon which they found on a side street, and had actually taken a ride therein through the principal street of the little town, to the consternation (when he saw them) of the old farmer who owned the wagon, and to the still greater consternation (when she heard of it) of Miss Seidmore.

"*Why*," continued that lady in impassioned tones, "have you thus forgotten what is due to yourself and your family?"

"I am sure I don't know, Miss Seidmore," Katherine had replied with honest contrition; "I—I just did it!" By which it will be seen that this young lady of high birth was, on occasion, as much the sport of freakish impulse as Katie O'Flarity, the daughter of the gardener at Brayton manor. All this by way of explanation—tho it is in no sense an excuse—for what is to follow.

The day was warm, as has been intimated, and the claims of "The Scarlet Doom" on the interest of the reader wavered after a little. Historical novels, dealing with the sanguinary past from a cold-blooded American standpoint, were decidedly out of place—thought this sapient young person—amid the fresh, breezy wilds of the Adirondacks. She dropped the book, to fix her undivided attention upon the antics of a pair of squirrels which

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AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

were frisking in primal gladness from bough to bough of the big pine. Her eyes followed them with a certain distinct satisfaction in the lawless freedom of these creatures of the wilderness, whose ancestors cast no chilling shadow upon the joyous present.

At this point, in the course of her aimless meditations, her vagrant fancy was again arrested by the big spool dangling by a scarlet thread from the branch just above her head. As she gazed at this simple object, Miss Terrill completely forgot her position in society and the august character of her lineage. After full five minutes of reflection, which—as subsequent events proved—might have been spent to better advantage, the descendant of the Brayton Carters deliberately stood up on her chair and detached the big spool from its position.

"This is a cobweb party," she said solemnly; "the scientific old professor and his box of bugs is the prize." With that, this model of all the proprieties" began to walk away into the woods, winding up the scarlet cord as she went.

From fragrant, low-dropping balsam to white-limbed birch; from sunny knoll, crowded with purple-fruited huckleberries, to solemn stretches of forest, where the winds loitered in the odorous branches of the pines, whispering strange, ancient secrets of earth and sky; through trackless wastes of sweet fern, where the gnats bit fiercely; through

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

dense blackberry-thickets, which clutched her savagely in their thorny arms; over fallen logs, half rotted away and carpeted deep with softest emerald mosses; past swampy spots, where the trim boots



FOLLOWING THE SPOOL

sank ankle deep in the black mud,—deeper and deeper into the pathless wilderness led the slender clue.

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AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

adventurer, lapsing into the camp vernacular, as she sank breathless on to a bank to rest, "but—I believe I'll go back without my prize. It must be nearly dinner-time."

She reached out after a sprig of wintergreen, where gay scarlet berries glimmered like live coals amid the overarching ferns, her brown cheeks dimpling as she reflected upon the undoubted consternation of the water-lily hunters. Then she sprang to her feet with an air of decision. "I must go back at once; we ought not to have stopped at all."

She glanced down at the bulky form of the big brown spool, and the full extent of her folly dawned suddenly upon her. "How can I go back? I've wound up the cord!"

It was characteristic of this young person that, preliminarily to a careful consideration of the question, she sank down and laughed—till she cried; this to the great astonishment and dismay of divers small woodsfolk, who paused in the business of the hour to observe the new and peculiar animal which produced such strange noises.

"I have come a mile," she reflected, sitting up and wiping her eyes; "for this spool is full, and number two hangs in the bushes yonder."

The idea of surprising an elderly student of science at his labors had been gradually growing less and less attractive; and now after a period of se-

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

rious reflection it ceased to appear either funny or fascinating in the slightest degree.

"He is undoubtedly a person who would be politely, sarcastically, and crushingly disagreeable because I had ventured to meddle with his absurd spools," decided Miss Terrill soberly. "I am very glad that I stopped in time; I shall have no trouble in reaching the camp from this point. Of course I shall put the spool exactly where I found it."

She rose slowly to her feet and looked meditatively about her. "I came by that big tree; I remember the dead branch hanging down to the ground."

Ah, foolish maid! keener eyes than those pretty brown ones of yours have been deceived by the wonderful likeness of everything to every other thing in the big woods. The tree with the dead branch certainly led to a perfectly familiar-looking bush; and the bush beguiled the weary little feet to an odorous group of balsams, where bright-eyed squirrels chattered angrily at the wearer of the jaunty red tam. And beyond the balsams there was a cup-like hollow where the beautiful deadly "Fly Amanita" thrust its golden globes through the black-leaf mold. Then the brambles clutched at her with their thorny fingers, and the treacherous mud tried to hold her away from the ripe huckleberries. And all the while the gnats and

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AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

mosquitoes followed hard after—like the hosts of an avenging fate.

But, yes; it was all perfectly plain and not at all far. She would soon catch a sparkle of blue water through the trees, and then dinner and a long, delicious rest in the hammock! The gruesome tales of wayfarers lost and starving in the woods were—she decided—simply figments of weak and elderly imaginations; mere bugaboos to keep small children within bounds. Any person of sound judgment and educated powers of observation could easily—

"Gracious!" Miss Terrill rarely made use of such vulgar exclamations, but the exigency of the occasion wrung it from her lips. The spool was again empty! She looked wildly about her; there was no welcome glimmer of blue water, no pervasive odor of a smoky camp-fire, no dinner, no hammock anywhere in sight.

"Well, there is only one thing to do," decided the girl after a second period of reflection, during which the humorous nature of the adventure did not once recur to her mind. "I will go back to the second spool once more, and try again. One can always do what one must do," she added sententiously, and with the air of one who combats an unpleasant suggestion.

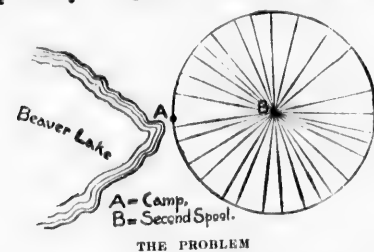
Two hours later, as she wearily retraced her steps for the third time to the spot where the second

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

spool hung in the bushes, the situation had resolved itself in her mind (she had been a "special" in mathematics) into the following concise form:

"Let A represent the camp, and B the position of the second spool, one mile distant from A. How many miles might a person travel in endeavoring to reach A, supposing he started from B in a different direction each time?"

"If the traveler started out from B and traveled in a perfectly straight line each time," she mur-



mured—a diagram of the problem presenting itself with appalling distinctness before her mental vision—"he might easily travel several hundred miles without reaching A. If he traveled in curved lines—as he certainly would—why——"

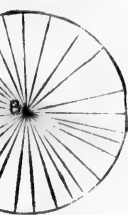
The undeniable conclusions were too harrowing to contemplate with calmness, therefore Miss Katherine Carter Terrill sat down upon a mossy log and shed tears for full five minutes. She be-

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AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

held herself, as it were, the wandering radius of
an unknown circle, returning innumerable times to
point B, and at last lying cold and unconscious on
the forest leaves, the fatal spool clutched tight in
her stiffened fingers.

"I shall never find it—never!" she wailed,
grinding the innocent cause of her misadventure
beneath her boot-heels. "But, oh, how can I let
that man find me, as he certainly will, if I hold on
to this wretched spool! I *can't*, if I have to die
of slow starvation—and I am so hu gry! But
suppose I leave the spool here, the unsuspecting
old gentleman will wind up to it, and then he will
have nothing to go by—not even point B!"

A vision of her own revered grandparent wan-
dering gaunt and famished through interminable
wastes of desolate forest filled her with a lively
anguish.

"No, I must not leave him to perish—it would
be murder!" she said with a shudder. "I will find
him and tell him what I have done."

PART II.

JOHN GEARING glanced hastily over the closely
written pages of his note-book by the waning light,
snapped the cover of his tin specimen-case with a
well-satisfied air, and rose to his feet.

"It must be getting along toward sunset," he
reflected, with a cursory glance at his watch.

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

"Capital day's work, tho; I shouldn't like to have missed that scarlet-headed arachnid. As for the coleopteron, I doubt if it has been generally recognized as a genuine erotylid—which it unquestionably is."

He paused to drop a full spool into his pocket and disengage an empty one from the limb of a mighty spruce, which stood among its fellows weeping odorous tears of purest gum. The bug-hunter eyed it thoughtfully, a cheerful vision of the camp frying-pan, replete with sizzling slices of fragrant bacon, to be succeeded by a long procession of substantial slapjacks, rising alluringly before him.

"Jove!" he muttered, "I forgot to eat my lunch!"

The reflections of the hungry scientist as he strode rapidly onward winding up his second spool were both comfortable and complacent. "A more useful device to save valuable time than this simple system of spools was never devised," he decided. "At this moment I am—approximately—one and one half miles from supper; with no doubtful trail to follow, no delays to puzzle over direction, no uncertainty whatever as to the exact point at which I shall——" He stopped short; his keen ear had caught the sound of crackling branches.

"A deer!" he muttered; "and coming right this way!"

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AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

Arachnida, Coleoptera, spools, and even supper were forgotten on the instant; and the bug-hunter, alert and silent, stood grasping his rifle, his eyes fixed on the low-growing tangle of evergreens from which the suspicious sounds had proceeded. A moment later and he was staring with undisguised amazement at the small figure which limped rapidly toward him.

"You are *not* Professor Gearing—I am so glad!" were the astonishing words with which the apparition introduced itself. It pushed back a scarlet tam-o'-shanter from a tangle of brown curls, and continued: "I don't know who you are, but I am Katherine Terrill and I am lost in these dreadful woods. Do take me home!" With that the figure sank back against a tree with a sound suspiciously like a sob.

"I—I do not understand," stammered the astounded bug-hunter lamely. "I can take you home, certainly; but I must acknowledge that I am John Gearing."

The wearer of the scarlet tam started up with a hysterical laugh. "Professor Gearing is an old man!" she cried, "and *you*—you are quite—quite young! I took his spool out of the camp, and I can't find the way back!"

"The spool—eh! You don't mean——"

"Yes, I do. I took it and wound it up to point B—I mean the second spool," faltered the mis-

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

chief-maker, her cheeks dyed with penitent blushes. "I—I was stopping at the camp, you see, for a few moments with a friend, and I saw the spool. I can't tell you why I did it." This last with a vain clutch after her vanished dignity. "It—it just occurred to me that it might be——"

"I hung that empty spool there merely as a tag at the end of my string," remarked John Gearing meditatively. "I certainly——"

"Say anything you like to me," interrupted Miss Terrill solemnly; "I deserve it. We shall never get home alive—never!"

John Gearing stared at the speaker for a full minute, then he threw back his head and laughed long and loud. "I—I beg your pardon, Miss Terrill," he said at length; "but really——"

"Oh, yes, you may laugh!" said the young lady with an indignant shrug. "I laughed too—at first. But it hasn't seemed a bit funny for at least six hours. I tell you we *can't* get back! We shall starve to death; and it's—it's getting dark!"

The bug-hunter was sobered in an instant by the pitiful quiver in the tired voice.

"You don't mean to say that you have been wandering about since morning with nothing to eat?" he asked anxiously.

"Nothing but huckleberries—and I loathe huckleberries!"

HIS ROPE

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AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

John Gearing hastily swung his pack-basket to the ground. "These sandwiches"—producing a parcel of dubious aspect—"have suffered somewhat, I fear, knocking about all day among my traps; but if you will accept them——"

"They look perfectly delicious!" declared the young lady with unconcealed delight. "But I shall eat only one,—it is just possible, you know, that we might—in time——"

"I beg that you will give yourself no further anxiety on that score!" cried John Gearing confidently. "We are only a trifle over a mile from camp; we'll be there inside of an hour."

The girl shook her head mournfully. "That we are so near is just the most dreadful part of it," she said, winking rapidly to keep back two big tears which were trying hard to pass the barrier of her long lashes. "But if you really think you can find the way, do let us start at once. Of course we can reach the second spool," she added. "I—I was frightened when I saw how late it was growing, so I came to meet you. I thought it was my duty to—to tell you——"

John Gearing surveyed the speaker in puzzled silence. "Do you—er—mind telling me," he burst out after a long pause, during which the stealthy twilight made perceptible advances, "what—that is—why you were so sure that I was somebody else—at first, you know?"

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

"What *must* you think of me!" exclaimed Miss Terrill irrelevantly, stopping short in the midst of a vicious tangle of blackberry-bushes for no other purpose, it appeared, than to wring her small hands. "It has all been so dreadful that I haven't realized *that*! You must think me bold and meddlesome and—and generally horrid!"

"I have thought nothing of the kind!" retorted the bug-hunter with unnecessary warmth. "It was all the fault of those infernal spools! I wouldn't mind this"—with a comprehensive wave of the hand which seemed to include all the hostile forces of nature—"if it were not for you. I should get into camp all right, sometime; but——"

"You may think so, but you couldn't," said the girl with a pitying glance at the stalwart figure. "It will be all the harder for you to bear; and when I think that I did it—that it is all my fault! But of course I didn't think—I could never have imagined—what a fatal thing I was doing when I touched that spool. No, wait till I have told you all." With that she poured forth the tale of the day's adventures, closing with a statement of the problem which she had spent six unhappy hours in trying to solve.

"Don't you see," she said in a shaking voice, "how utterly improbable it is that we shall *ever* reach point A?"

John Gearing had smiled more than once during

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AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

this recital; he also frowned as he stared anx-
iously into the black depths of the forest which
shut them in like a wall.

"Miss Terrill," he said gravely, "your conclu-
sions are undeniably logical and unpleasantly cor-
rect—from your premises; but luckily there are
other factors which you have overlooked, and which
must be introduced. One is, that the guides are sure
to beat the woods for miles about point A. There is,
therefore, not the slightest danger of our becoming
either variable or permanent radii of point B. The
only question to be considered at present is, shall
we make any immediate attempt to solve the prob-
lem ourselves? You are already weary, and——"

"You might attach a second spool at point B,"
interrupted the girl, knitting her pretty brows;
"our chances would then be multiplied by two."

"But I object to the preliminary division," said
John Gearing decidedly; "it simply isn't to be
thought of. The darkness has closed in upon us
at an unconscionably early hour," he went on rap-
idly. "I can not understand it, unless, to add to
our perplexity, it is about to——" A drop of
water which landed squarely on the tip of his nose
explained the phenomenon.

"It is raining," observed Miss Terrill with the
calmness of despair. "But of course that was to
be expected. We will go on," she added firmly.
"No—I am not at all tired, and I am quite accus-

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

tomed to the woods." This last with a superb gesture of refusal as her victim offered his arm.

Two minutes later her foot slipped on a treacherous log, and with a cry she plunged forward into the darkness.

John Gearing was at her side in an instant. "My poor little girl," he murmured, lifting her with all possible gentleness, "are you much hurt?"

"At all events I have not sprained my ankle," said the girl with a faint laugh. "But I slipped once before to-day, and--"

John Gearing groaned. "I shall never forgive myself for my outrageous folly!" he declared savagely, and quite involuntarily he tightened the clasp of his strong arms.

Miss Terrill laughed again in spite of herself. "Put me down, please, Mr. Gearing," she said. "If you should change most of the pronouns in your last statement to the second person, it would be quite what I deserve. I fear I shall have to stop where I am; but you must go on. Please go at once before it gets any darker."

"And leave you here alone?"

"Yes."

By way of answer, John Gearing hastily divested himself of his thick shooting-jacket and wrapped it about his companion with an authoritative firmness which admitted of no question.

"I have four matches—and a half, to be exact,"

HIS ROPE

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Alfred H.



ALICE M.

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

he said, after a careful search through his various pockets. "Luckily it hasn't rained long enough to wet the ground; if the fates aren't too unkind we'll have a camp-fire inside of five minutes."

A flash, a sizzle, an impatient exclamation announced that match number one had weakly succumbed to the untoward influences of the place and hour. Two, three, and four followed with disheartening unanimity, during intervals plainly occupied in a frantic search for dryer material.

"If you only had some paper," ventured a timid voice out of the darkness.

"Of course! Thank heaven you reminded me before I struck that last half-match!"

Another moment, and a score of closely written pages treating learnedly of the coleoptera and arachnida of the great northern wilderness were blazing merrily in the midst of a skilfully constructed pile of twigs and branches.

"Wasn't it fortunate you happened to have that paper?" observed Miss Terrill, as she leaned forward to warm her chilled fingers at the now thoroughly established fire.

"Fortunate!" echoed John Gearing, dropping his specimen-box as he stooped to lay another stick on the fire—whereat the scarlet-headed arachnid and the coleoptera, one and all, wriggled out and away with joyful haste. "It was by all odds the most fortunate thing I know of."

AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

"Perhaps you will think me a coward," began the girl, after a prolonged pause which the rain-drops filled with a soft, insistent murmur. "Do you think it would be very wrong for me—that is, for you——" She turned her head away from the searching firelight as she continued in so low a voice that John Gearing was forced to bend his tall head to listen—"if they find us? You said they would search for us?"

"They will search for us—certainly, and find us."

"If they know—that is, if you—if—I must tell them that I took the spool to—to find you, I could not face them—I could not bear it!"

"Ah, but the fact is that I found you!" said John Gearing in his deepest voice.

"Yes—but—the spools!"

The bug-hunter leaned forward and deliberately dropped a full half dozen of them into the red heart of the fire.

"There are no spools," he said calmly.

A more unpleasant spot than the virgin forest of the Adirondacks on a wet night it would be difficult to find. Mr. Percy Algernon Smith put this fact more forcibly; he said——. But why repeat the words of a man who has forced his way through some six or eight miles of soaking coves, pursued all the way by jubilant throngs of mosquitoes—his

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AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

energies being still further taxed by laborious and systematic performances on a big tin horn?

"I say, Jake," he bawled, pausing after a succession of ear-splitting blasts, "I've hear anything?"

The guide nodded. "To the west on us," he said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "'Tain't fur, neither."

The sagacious reader has already divined that this is only the beginning of the story. Its ending was after the old, old fashion, of which wise people the world over never grow tired, and which in truth is the end—or the beginning—of every story that is at all worth the telling. In this place it must be set down in just four words—afterward they were married.

It was my good fortune, not many months later, to hear Mrs. John Gearing relate the above romantic circumstances, which she did with the prettiest smiles and blushes imaginable.

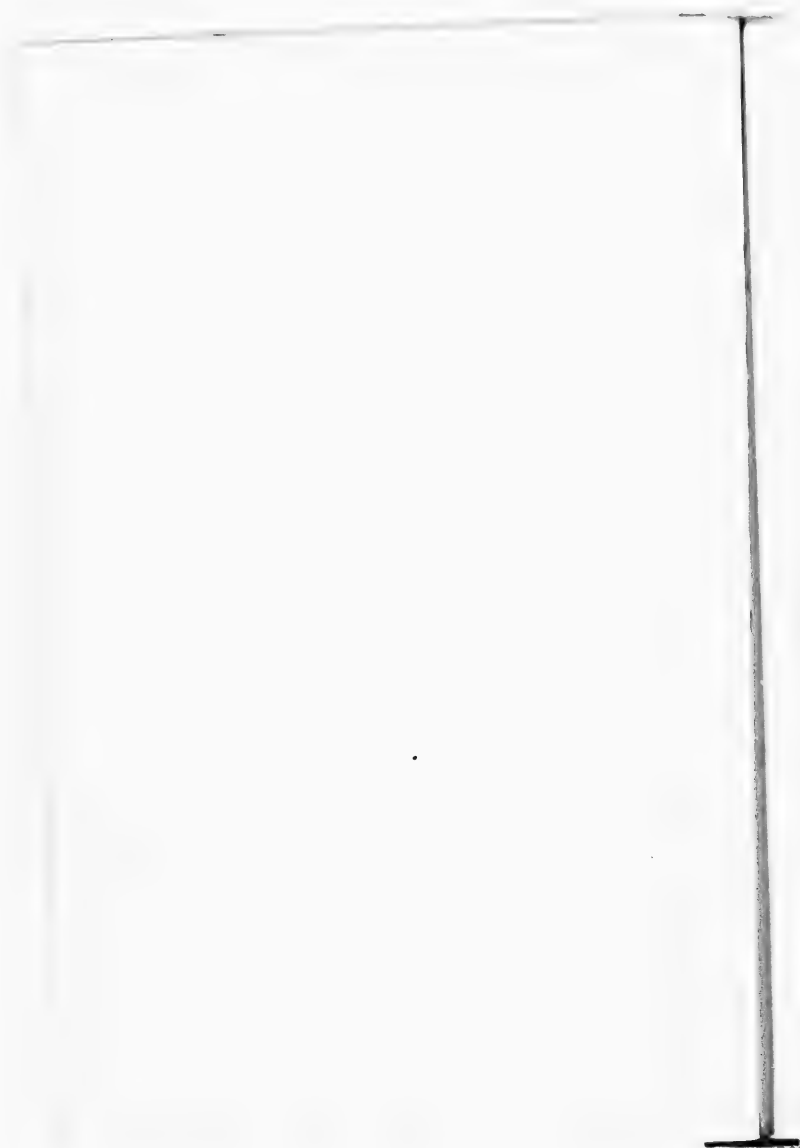
In closing she declared solemnly that never in all the course of her existence had such a welcome, glad, cheerful, happy, enlivening, and altogether delightful vision greeted her eyes, as the round, freckled face of "Cinnamon" Smith as he burst through the dripping branches on that rainy August night.

But she never so much as mentioned the spools; it was their ashes that told the tale.

**The Easter
of La Mercedes**

**By
Mary C. Francis**

**Illustration
By
Freeland A. Carter**



THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

CHAPTER I.

IT WAS Easter morning of 1895 in the city of Puerto Principe. Since early mass at four o'clock the populace had been astir in the grim old city, and hour by hour the throng had increased as the time for the great procession to leave the Iglesia Mayor approached, until now the narrow streets were jammed with a crowd that filled every avenue.

The worshipers were on their way to the church to swell the parade as the risen Christ was borne forth to lead the way to La Mercedes, and they were in holiday attire; for of all the religious feast days of the church, that of the resurrection is the most imposing. Over the Moorish towers of La Mercedes the sun streamed brightly into the crooked, ill-paved byways and glinted ominously on the sword-hilt of a Spanish colonel.

In the cool shadows of gray walls some negresses, gaudily tricked out, slouched impudently, their slippered feet sliding loosely over the stones and their gay garments splotted against the neutral background like daubs of paint on a canvas.

THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

The scene was curiously like a play: a shifting panorama of color, light, air, flowers, candles, the flutter of feminine garments, the strains of music from the orchestra, and the chanting of sweet, boyish young voices. One sinister note was evident in the mingling of the soldiery with the crowd, alien and unwelcome, their presence studiously ignored whenever possible, tho only with discretion. The shadow of the uprising lay over the city. An unacknowledged terror knocked at every heart. Still, it was so early in the revolution that secret hope burned in each breast. In the plaza about the Iglesia Mayor the dense crowd grew denser with each moment. The glory of the great feast day was about to burgeon, and every one impatiently awaited the moment when the life-sized figure of the Christ should appear at the door of the church and proclaim in his body the risen Lord.

Forth from an iron gateway there issued a little band, aerial, spiritual, like visions seen in dreams. They were children dressed as angels. None could have been more than eight years of age. Their sweet, childish faces were serious with that adolescent gravity which only infantile innocence can wear. They looked straight ahead of them as, led by two sisters, they emerged from the cool greenness of the inner courtyard into the scarlet blaze of the sun, and walked in double file down the dusty

MERCEDES

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street toward the church. All were dressed in short, fluffy white skirts, their plump arms bare, and springing from their shoulders were gauze and silken wings. Their heads were crowned with chaplets of flowers, and in their hands they bore palm-leaves. The sisters carried lighted candles, and intoned a chant, joined by two more sisters following the children.

Araceli and her aunt pressed forward to get a better view.

"Sanctissimi!" whispered Araceli to Joaquin, "do you see Pepita? Is she not angelic? What a pity that one wing is a little crooked! I remember I was an angel at Easter when I was five. Ah, how proud I felt! And you, Joaquin—you were the Christ that same Easter, do you remember?"

The young man smiled sardonically.

"Yes, I remember," he said indifferently. "What nonsense it all is! I have learned better in the United States."

The aunt crossed herself piously as a priest heralded by acolytes passed in pomp.

"Cuidado!" ("Look out"!) whispered Araceli sharply, a slight tremor shaking her voice. Even as she uttered the warning, General Mellia, civil and military governor of the city and province, went by in full uniform, gorgeous in lace and military trappings, attended by his staff.

Joaquin Agramonte looked attentively at the

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Spaniard. The tension of his mouth increased. The girl, watching his face intently, found something there to arouse her fears.

"Are you under suspicion?" she asked in a faint tone that seemed to exhale from motionless lips.

"Yes, assuredly," replied Joaquin. "Do you suppose an Agramonte* could spend four years in a university in the United States and return to Cuba at the outbreak of another revolution and not be suspected? My family is like your own, Araceli, born to fight and die for Cuban liberty. I have come back, and I know what the consequences may be. There in the plaza yonder the Spaniards burned the body of my ancestor, General Ignacio Agramonte, after he had fallen in battle, and scattered his ashes to the winds. I too am an Agramonte, and Cuba may have me if necessary."

"Madre de Dios!" ("Mother of God!") muttered the girl, her face growing ashen under her mantilla. The young man, who had spoken pas-

* The solid silver sepulcher, the throne of the Virgin, and the central altar in the church of La Mercedes, in Puerto Principe, were given by the ancestors of Caridad Agüero. General Ignacio Agramonte, commander-in-chief of the Cuban forces in the ten-years' war, had his body publicly burned by the Spaniards in the plaza after they found him dead on the battle-field, and his ashes were scattered to the winds. Nearly every male member of the Agramonte family has been educated in the United States for generations, and most of them have fallen fighting for Cuba's liberty.

MERCEDES

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sionately, but in hushed, cautious tones, took sud-
den note of the girl's agitation.

"Cheer up!" he said brightly. "You know
what that red and yellow flag means for you and
for every woman in Cuba as long as it floats over
this island. Until it comes down there is no hope
for any of you to become like——"

He broke off abruptly, and with averted eyes
seemed to contemplate some inner comparison.

"Ah, I know," said the girl quickly. "You
mean like las señoritas Americanas! Yes, they
are educated, cultured; they are permitted to at-
tend the great schools with the men, and to speak
and write; and, Dios mío, they may be lawyers
and doctors—is it not so?"

"Yes."

"Ah, how happy they must be! Do they know
how much they have to be thankful for?"

"They are very"—a long pause—"admirable."

His face was pensive.

The girl's glorious dark eyes, filled with the la-
tent fires of the women of her race, gazed fixedly
at him, and then dilated as tho with an inner il-
lumination.

"And they are very beautiful," she said in a
quick staccato.

"Hush, Araceli!" said the aunt sternly. "Why
do you speak so loud? You should be saying an
Ave."

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The girl's eyes imperatively demanded an answer of the youth.

"Yes, they are beautiful," he said, apparently with reluctance; "but they are also attractive in other ways. They are intellectual."

"Ah, yes!" the girl sighed,—*"I understand. Joaquin, when you come back from the field I too will speak English. You see I know a little now, and then I can learn something. I too will be educated."*

The young man let his eyes rest on her with an unfathomable expression.

"You are very quick, Araceli, and you will learn rapidly. You shall have one of my books."

She smiled her thanks.

"But tell me, what is your mission? What are you going to do?"

Under pretext of observing the spectacle, he closely scanned all who were near. Then he replied in carefully modulated tones: "I am to go to Gomez with despatches—no, do not be alarmed,—my messages are all verbal—and after I deliver them I shall join Marti."

"Ah, 'El Maestro'! Let us say a prayer for him."

An ironical expression flitted over the young man's features.

"Us, Araceli? No, you say the prayers today. I am here only for appearance' sake. If there be a God——"

MERCEDES

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"Ah, Mother of God, be silent!" said the girl in a hoarse whisper, crossing herself. "Joaquin, it is not safe to speak so here. What if they should hear you? Besides, what has happened to you? You did not use to talk this way. Do you not believe in God and heaven!"

"I believe in the freedom of Cuba," he replied firmly. "Liberty is my religion, and I will live and die fighting for it."

"'Patria y Libertad,' " murmured the girl. "Yes, I too would die for Cuba if need be."

They had now reached the plaza. The throng, closely packed in the church, overflowed on to the steps, out into the plaza and the adjacent streets, silent, attentive, devout. The deep solemnity of an intensely religious sentiment brooded like an actual presence over the hushed, expectant thousands. From within the curiously stained walls of the old church there rolled the deep, sonorous waves of music, stately, solemn, serene. Then one impressive, vibrating interval of silence, while the very air seemed to undulate with sound-phantoms that pierced the inner senses. Every eye was ardently fixed on the church door. In their religious exaltation they had reached that peculiar psychic climax where the illusion becomes the miracle; and as the doors swung open and the radiant figure of the Christ appeared, borne on a gorgeous canopied platform, an overpowering burst of har-

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mony and the chiming of many bells pealed forth the risen Lord.

The array was a stately one. Priests and fathers in superbly embroidered vestments walked solemnly, attended by incense-bearers who flung aromatic perfumes from their gold and silver vessels out into the shimmering air, and by a choir of boys whose voices of crystalline purity penetrated the volume of the orchestra and the incessant chiming of the bells like a dominant motif.

In front walked little Pepita Bencoma, who had the honor of impersonating the Christ. She was a small, well-formed child, about five years old. Her large dark eyes were dilated by the strange, confused emotions that surged in her childish soul—awe, inspired by a nebulous idea of the Divine tragedy, and vanity caused by the envy of her playmates. She had cried at first when her mother had told her that she must have her beautiful hair cut, but now she was proud of the short, crisp curls that clustered about her pretty head. Every detail of the crucifixion was pictured. In the person of this unheeding child were represented the agonies of Calvary. The tiny, upraised palms of her hands were red with the painted lacerations of the cross. Her small bare feet, thrust into sandals, showed the marks of the nails. A simulated crown of thorns was pressed into her temples, and blood-stains trickled over her forehead, wrists, and ankles.

MERCEDES

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In front walked little Pepita Bencoma

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She wore but a single garment—a short, coarse brown skirt. The upper part of her body was bare, and in her side was portrayed the spear-thrust. As she walked, her eyes fixed steadily in front of her, she remembered that her mother had told her that she must not notice any of her friends in the throng.

The great solid silver sepulcher of the church of La Mercedes in which the Christ had been interred on Good Friday, and from which he had now arisen amid this joyous and triumphant clangor, was ostentatiously borne, a symbol of death cheated of its prey. The child-angels followed, their white and spotless garments fair in the golden glamor of light, and their piping voices helping to swell the tide of music, while over all the unceasing chiming of the bells made a heavy, rhythmic harmony. The great multitude pressed in closely. Dark eyes glowed under the mantilla, and there was a riot of color and beauty fit for a carnival. Each member of the procession carried a lighted candle, and many bore palm-leaves or garlands of flowers.

The music swelled louder as the procession swept on toward La Mercedes, gorgeous in pomp and pageantry, effulgent and imposing, a spectacle of military and ecclesiastical power in a country even at that moment deep in the throes of rebellion against both church and state. Onward proceeded the cavalcade to the plaza of La Mercedes. Win-

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dows of houses were open, and in many appeared palms, flowers, and plants, or images of Christ or the Virgin. As the procession turned at last toward the great open square of the church for the final ceremonies, the culmination of the spectacular effects was most impressive. Borne high in air, Mary, the divine mother, came forth from the church to greet her risen Son. She was crowned with a golden halo, and her garments of pure white glistened in the sunlight with gold and silver and precious gems that adorned her person and made her a dazzling figure. The music that now pealed forth rolled throughout the city and far beyond its confines. The two figures of the Christ and our Lady of Many Sorrows were carried side by side into the great sanctuary, and there seated on two thrones, that of the Virgin being of solid silver.

The deep-toned organ in the loft took up the theme in sonorous tones, and the choir burst into an anthem of stately beauty. The eager throng wedged itself within the church and gazed entranced at the scene. The central altar of ornate solid silver, banked with a profusion of flowers, glowed with the light of innumerable candles, their points of flame illuminating the figures of a host of saints disposed in the niches. The priests ascended the steps in solemn array, and as the celebration of the high mass began, a great awe settled upon the peo-

A MERCEDES

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ple, which deepened as the service progressed with the mingled perfumes of the flowers and the odor of the incense, the misty figures of the child-angels and the acolytes seen cloudily through the wreaths of blue smoke ascending from the swinging censers, the chanting, the intoned prayers, the palpitating waves that surged through the church, until an effect sinister and unreal was created in the mind of a spectator not deluded with its pomp.

Araceli followed the services with a devout intensity, but Agramonte made but a perfunctory show of devotion. His face was impassive. It was impossible to imagine what might be passing in his mind.

At last the long and intricate service was concluded. The audience began to disperse slowly, being impeded by the many outside who had not been able to obtain entrance, but who had patiently waited throughout the services.

Slowly carried along in the crush, Araceli and Joaquin reached the door. As they emerged and viewed the throng from the top of the high flight of steps forming the entrance to the edifice, Joaquin's quick eye discerned at the foot of the steps to the left the signal that meant life or death to him. Pushing through the crowd was a Spanish officer accompanied by four soldiers. Realizing that in a moment more he would be under arrest and his fate in all probability sealed, Joaquin

THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

instantly turned to the right and forcibly made his way. Altho not one person in ten could see the soldiers from that side of the church, an intuitive understanding flashed like a magnetic wave through the hearts of all. Agramonte quickly gained the right of the church, where not more than fifty feet away his servant stood waiting with his horse.

The watchful eyes of the Spanish officer caught the movement, and ordering two of his men to follow him, they roughly pushed aside the now-terrified people with their rifles. The three rushed up the steps while the other two attempted to reach the right side of the plaza through the crowd. As the officer gained the top of the flight and caught sight of Agramonte, he ordered his men to fire at him over the heads of the throng. As they raised their rifles, a shriek pierced the air, and Araceli, throwing up both arms wildly, rushed from behind and pushed the rifles upward. With an oath the officer seized the girl and flung her back into the church. Again the shots rang out, but Agramonte had swung himself into the saddle, and was now in front of the hotel Oriental; where, as he was turning into the Calle Santa Aña, the soldiers fired again, this time wounding him.

Riding like the wind out the Santa Aña road until near the bridge, he spied a horse standing under a mango-tree. Knowing that it was of vital

A MERCEDES

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THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

importance to start his pursuers on the wrong trail,
he cut the hitching-strap, and lashing the horse fu-
riously, drove him over the bridge in a cloud of
dust, while he turned sharply to the left and down
a narrow side street, eventually taking a road that
led toward Najassa, to the southeast. Not until
the hot and enraged soldiery came up with the
riderless horse near the hospital of San Lazaro did
they realize that their prey had escaped.

Inside the church, Araceli, cared for by her
aunt and by many friendly hands, revived from
the unconsciousness that had drowned her senses.

With the smoldering hatred of Spain and her
despotism fanned into a fiercer and yet more rebel-
lious flame, the populace hurried to their homes.

Within the deserted church the Christ and the
Virgin sat alone, serene and divine amid their
fragrant offerings.

CHAPTER II.

"MIGUEL, we are almost there now?"

"Yes, Araceli."

The girl shivered a little in the gibbous moon-
light. A cold, unearthly light lay over the land-
scape, and the fringe of palms in the distance
loomed against the horizon like specters through
the thick white mist that curled up from the earth.
Their horses' hoofs echoed on the ground and oc-

THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

casionally swished in the high, wet grass. Silence fell between the two again, and they rode without speaking, each wrapped in somber thoughts. Presently the girl spoke again.

"Miguel!"

"Yes."

"Will they be expecting us?"

"No, I scarcely think so; but Joaquin will not be surprised to have me join him."

The girl turned sharply in her saddle.

"Join him, Miguel!"

"My dear sister, you know I would go to the woods sooner or later, and you know Joaquin is my dearest friend. We will go together."

"Then you will not go back with me?"

"You had better stay with aunt Dolores a while."

As he spoke they emerged from a shaded road into the open portrero, and not far in front of them lay the beautiful country home of the Sanchez at Vista Ermosa, located back from the road under the shade of marmacillos at the end of a long avenue of palms.

As they approached the house it was evident that even at midnight there was an unusual activity. Lights showed, and figures were moving about.

"Quien va?" ("Who goes?") came the imperative demand, as Miguel and Araceli turned their

LA MERCEDES

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THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

horses into the palm avenue, and the waning
moonlight glinted along the barrel of a rifle in
front of them.

"Agramonte," responded Miguel promptly.
"This is my sister, Carlos. Is Joaquin badly
hurt?"

"No, señor," said the sentry, saluting.

"There are thirty of us to go with him now."

"Good!"

"Ah, Miguel!" cried a dozen voices, as they
reined up at the open sala. "Welcome! Buenos
dias, señorita."

"Araceli," said a well-known voice, "you here!
Let me help you. You must be tired."

Five leagues of hard riding in the saddle under
an intense mental tension had weakened the girl,
and she trembled as Joaquin assisted her from her
horse.

"No, I am not tired. You, Joaquin, your wound
—is it a severe one?"

"No; a mere scratch in my arm and shoulder,
and the left at that. I'm in luck. How is it that
you have come out here, Araceli,—to see Miguel
off?"

She was sitting in the nearest hammock, and the
light of a lamp fell squarely on her face. As he
spoke, she raised her eyes to his, and in the inten-
sity of that glance the full revelation of the truth
dawned upon him. The discovery was like a

THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

shock to his gentle, chivalrous nature. A wave of something like self-reproach ran over him. Had they not been perhaps something more than friends before he had left the island?

"You are faint from fatigue," he said gently. "Stay here and I will get you a cup of coffee."

When he returned he found her pale as ivory, but calm and self-possessed. By the light of lamps and candles the scene of hurried activity familiar to the early days of the revolution went busily forward. Rifles, saddles, blankets, harness—all the miscellaneous paraphernalia of the little insurgent band lay scattered around, while the men pushed their preparations for departure with vigilant haste. Out in *la cocina* the women of the household busied themselves about large kettles swinging over glowing beds of fire, and the odor of fragrant coffee filled the air. Every one was engaged in some office. Even the children were up, and with childish curiosity were deep in the enjoyment of the scene, the import of which they failed to realize.

"Araceli," said Joaquín kindly, and with a deep inward emotion, "I have heard what you did this morning. I know that I owe my escape to you."

"No, it is nothing," said the girl in a suppressed voice.

"Yes, it is more than nothing. Just now it means everything to me. I shall never forget it."

A MERCEDES

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THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

"You need not remember it," replied Araceli, in
a tone so stifled that Joaquin could scarcely catch
the words.

"Need not remember it, Araceli! Why, what
do you mean! We have been friends ever since we
were children together, and I have thought more of
you than of—of—" The impulse which had
carried him thus far failed him. He dared not
finish it.

"Than of any other girl, Joaquin?"

The words escaped from white and motionless
lips. Her eyes blazed in an ashen face, but her
manner was strangely quiet. The issue which he
would so gladly have avoided suddenly confronted
him, and every impulse of his nature shrank from
it. His averted eyes stared hard at the ceiling.

"Joaquin, look at me."

After a painful interval their eyes met in that
revealing and illuminating gaze that defies deceit.
In that moment she knew the truth which she had
fought against believing; yet, even as the blow
fell, her strength returned.

"It is too late," she said, with a strange smile.

"Very well, it is fate."

"Araceli," began Joaquin appealingly.

She waved him aside with a little imperious ges-
ture he remembered, and, turning in the hammock,
she looked far out into the night and spoke slowly,
as tho in a dream:

THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

"Ah, it is no matter! I knew how it would be. You have been four years in the United States and you have met their women. They are not ignorant like us, and——"

"Araceli!"

"And they are free—free to learn the thousand and one graces of the intellect which give them such a charm, such an advantage over us. Ah, Dios mio, why did I have to be a Cuban woman!"

Her voice was anguished. Her purplish black hair lay in heavy, damp masses about her brow.

"Araceli, listen; there are no better or more beautiful women in the world than the Cuban women. God knows I honor and revere them. I think too much of you to cause you one pang if I could help it."

"Ah, no, no, no! I do not blame you. It is not your fault."

"Heaven knows not intentionally. I beg of you to try to replace me with some one who——"

"Ah, could you now replace her—that other!"

"Why in the name of all that is just can we not control these things?" cried Joaquin.

"They are beyond our power; they come and go like lightning, and it is done."

"Araceli, you are a brave girl."

"No, not brave. Perhaps I am proud."

"Proud! It is I who am proud of you. Listen, Araceli. At dawn I go to the woods, and I shall

LA MERCEDES

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THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

stay there until Cuba is free or until I fall. We
do not know whether we shall ever meet again.
For the sake of our old friendship, for the sake of
Cuba, let us part friends."

"For the sake of our old friendship? It is dead.
For the sake of Cuba? Who knows what her fate
may be! For these—no; but for your sake, Joa-
quín, for your sake—yes."

He felt shaken to the heart.

Leaning a little forward, he touched her hand
unobserved. "God bless you!" he whispered.

The night wore slowly away. In the dense
darkness that precedes the dawn all was at length
quiet save for the subdued voices of Miguel and
Joaquín, who had talked all night with that com-
panionship of men in arms who know they are
comrades to the death.

A solitary candle flickered feebly, and by its
uncertain beam could be seen the forms of the men:
some in their hammocks, some on the floor; all
fully dressed, and each with his rifle near.

"It is time we prepared for the start," said
Joaquín. "You had better call José and have
him set about saddling the horses."

The words had scarcely left his lips when a
rifle-shot rang out. In an instant every man
leaped to his feet. From within came the terrified

THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

exclamations of the women and the shrill cries of the children before they rushed out.

Ere the full realization of the significance of the shot dawned upon them, the second shot echoed crisply.

"The horses," cried Joaquin. "Mount!"

There was a confusion of voices, a sharp challenge, and the third warning of the outpost was answered by a volley from the enemy which sent a hundred Mauser bullets whirring through the grove with that peculiar metallic wail which, once heard, can never be forgotten. Some of the balls cut their way through the house. The volley was instantly replied to by a score of shots from the Cubans.

"Come," shouted Joaquin, "that will hold them in check until we can escape. Come, Miguel!"

As he spoke he threw himself into the saddle, but at that moment Miguel gave a cry and sank to his knees in the doorway leading to the inner rooms. Joaquin sprang from his horse and rushed to him. There, supported on her brother's shoulder, lay Araceli, white and motionless, blood slowly oozing from a small orifice in the bosom of her dress. One of the missives of death had found its mark. Her eyes were closed, her face peaceful. It was impossible for an unpractised eye to tell whether she breathed or not.

"Araceli! Araceli!" cried Miguel.

MERCEDES

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THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

They bent over her.
She opened her eyes and looked vaguely upward.
"Where—are—you?—I—can—not—see——"
Shaking with emotion, Joaquin slipped his arm
under her head.

"Araceli, I am here. Speak to me!"
"Ah,—Joaquin—Miguel—good-by. It—is—
better—so. Kiss me."

Her head fell back. The agonized women burst
into convulsive sobbing.

"Mother of God!" cried Carlos, breaking into
the little group, "fly instantly! The Spanish
column is almost here."

"Come, Joaquin," said Miguel, "she is dead.
The Spanish regulars will not molest women and
children. Let us escape to avenge her."

Joaquin hesitated a second, with his eyes fas-
tened on the face of the dead girl—his playmate
and child-sweetheart in days gone by. She had
lost her life in coming to see him. She would have
given it gladly to save him, could she have done
so. Would the other in the United States, to whom
he was engaged, do as much! Quien sabe?

Again came the warning voice of the brother:
"Joaquin, the Spaniards are coming down the
lane. Our men have all gone. You have not a
moment to lose."

It was true; the clanking of the enemy's side-
arms could already be heard. Hastily tearing the

THE EASTER OF LA MERCEDES

little banderilla from his hat, he laid the miniature Cuban flag tenderly over the little blue hole in her breast, from which a few drops of blood had trickled down, pressed his lips to the cold white forehead for just an instant, then vaulting into the saddle, was away like the wind.

"You have Agramonte here," said the Spanish colonel, reining up in front of the house.

"He is gone," said one of the women.

"After him!" ordered the colonel to his men. "Who is that you are nursing?" he asked suspiciously, pointing toward the cot where Araceli lay.

The woman kneeling by her raised her grief-distorted face defiantly, and flung one arm out with a gesture as tho she would strike.

"Spain's first victim of the revolution. Look at her, if you wish. It is our Easter offering to your monarchy."

The colonel strode across the room, glanced down at the inanimate form, and started back. Removing his hat, he said: "Care for her tenderly. She is my wife's sister."

A MERCEDES

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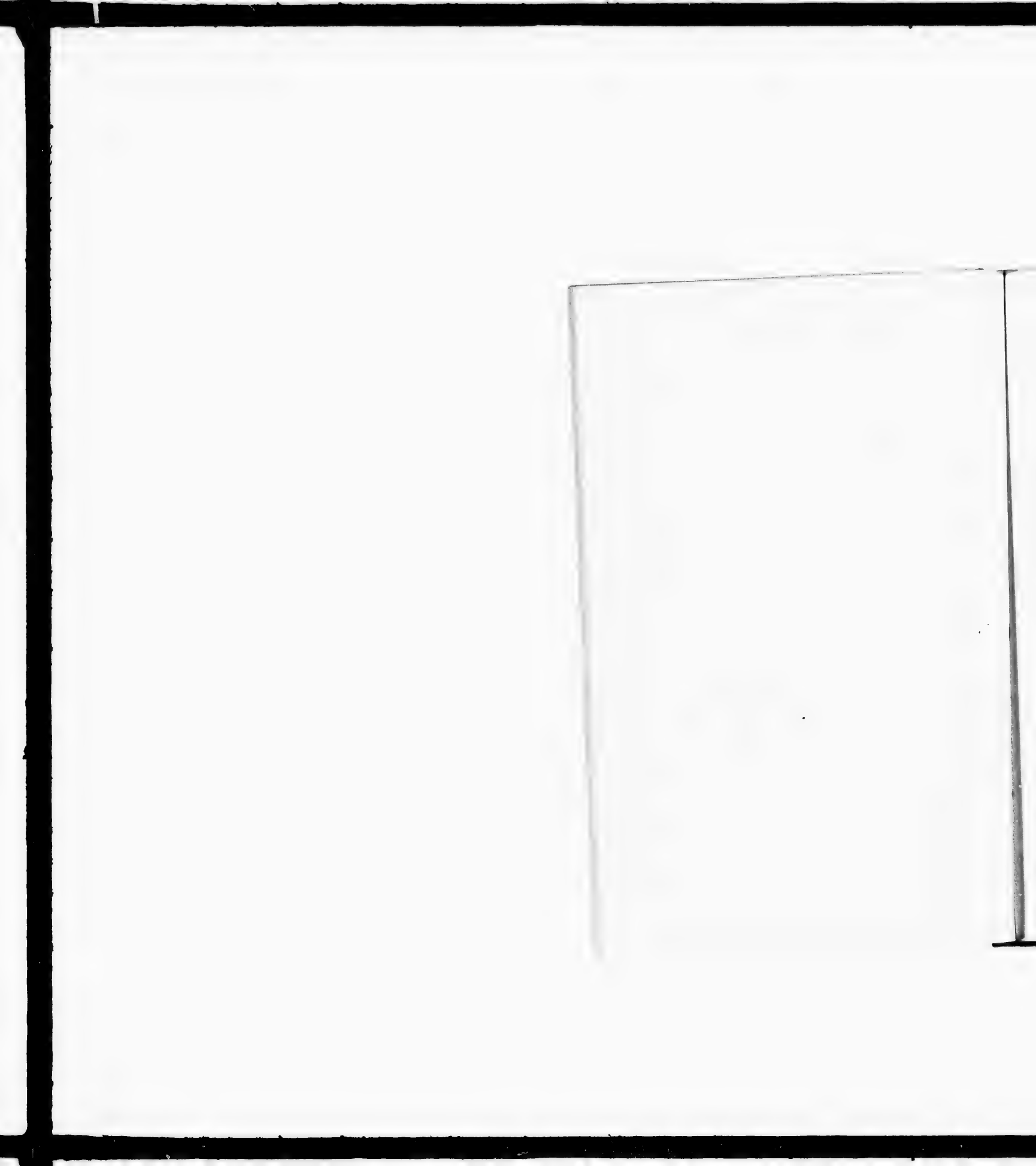
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Romance of
a Tin Roof
and a Fire-Escape

By
Myrta L. Avary



ROMANCE OF A TIN ROOF AND A FIRE-ESCAPE

You can live in New York all your life and not know your next-door neighbor, is an old proverb applicable to all large cities, but presenting only that side of the question seen by people who are not blessed with adjoining roofs and fire-escapes.

Mary's and Dorothy's windows opened on a beautiful tin roof—"almost equal to a summer-garden," they declared in their simple-hearted enjoyment of this luxury: a very hot one, by way of reflection, on a summer's day; a cool one, after sundown, if any wind was blowing. The girls were fond of spreading straw mats on the tin, piling up a lot of cushions thereon, and stretching themselves lazily under the summer starlight until they had "cooled off" and had forgotten, in looking at the pure calm of infinite heights, the stuffy downtown office and the everlasting tick of the typewriting-machines.

They were full-blooded Knickerbockers, and had "Van" before their names. They were stenographers also; Mary earned fifteen, Dorothy twelve

ROMANCE OF A TIN ROOF

dollars a week, the larger portion of which went to their landlady, leaving a slim remainder for clothes and car-fare. Somehow, they always managed to look trim. They were handy with needles and renovating implements; and after coming from their work, usually put in an hour or two of their evenings in repairing wardrobes.

"I don't know what would become of us if it wasn't for the roof," said Dorothy, who, like Trilby, had a fancy for light laundry-work, evidence of which was usually fluttering from the line on the roof—especially on the Sabbath, which was a great wash-day.

"How people who haven't a roof clean their wheels, *I* don't know," commented Mary, struggling with her own at that particular minute.

"And how do they dry their heads?" mused Dorothy.

Head-washing and drying their long, unbound tresses in the sun was another Sunday occupation. Moreover, they did a lot of sewing on that roof Sundays. Let those who have never needed to practise Sabbath industries forbear to criticize. And let not the uninformed think Mary and Dorothy isolated cases of depravity. Their conduct is the rule, and not the exception in New York city, where two thirds of the great army of female stenographers spend their Sabbaths in worthy endeavor that they may present a tidy appearance

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AND A FIRE-ESCAPE

during the week. They have no money to pay for their sewing, they have no other time in which to do their sewing; they must be neat when they go to work or they can not keep their work.

Mary and Dorothy squeezed a religious service into every Sabbath. They were regular attendants on an old aristocratic downtown church, in whose graveyard their great-great-grandfather, one of New Amsterdam's greatest and richest citizens in his day, was quietly sleeping in honorable sepulture, while his pretty, gentle great-great-granddaughters were struggling to make their daily bread and the modest gowns in which they tripped past his tomb into the old church, to whose prosperity his wealth and devotion had contributed, and into whose coffers their pennies dropped faithfully every Sunday. In this church worshiped with them those who would have recognized the bond of blood and have advanced their interests, had it ever occurred to the young women to make their existence and their poverty known.

What with churchgoing, sewing, washing, ironing, wheel-cleaning, et cetera, Sunday was a busy day. "It would kill us," they told each other, "but for the roof. We are not grateful enough for such a blessing. How *do* those poor girls live who have to do all their work in one room?"

"How fortunate," they reiterated a thousand times, "that that dear good tree stands in just the

ROMANCE OF A TIN ROOF

right place to preserve our privacy on the one side; and that we are flanked on the other with a piano factory which no one inhabits Sundays; and that nobody but women ever take the fourth-floor rooms next door!"

They were to lose the last cause for congratulation.

One Sunday at high noon, Dorothy was hanging her stockings on the line.

A gentleman stepped out on the fire-escape next door.

Dorothy's sense of embarrassment was mixed with a feeling that she ought to call a policeman and have a stop put to this invasion of private rights.

The unhappy man got such a stare that he exclaimed hastily, "Oh, I beg your pardon!" and stumbled back into his window.

"Polly," said Dorothy, sticking her head into her own window, "it's too bad for anything! A man's taken the room next door!"

"What's he like?" asked Polly.

For several days after Dorothy's stare scared him indoors, the man did not dare put his head out of his window—that is, when they were around. Also he kept his blinds half drawn.

A TIN ROOF

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AND A FIRE-ESCAPE

"He must die of the heat in there," said Dorothy, as if divided between humane impulses and the desire that he should.

He seemed to keep pretty well posted as to their movements. After a certain Sunday morning when, in the exuberance of their spirits over the event, they made such noisy preparation for a sail that everybody in earshot was obliged to be aware of the contemplated excursion, they returned quiet and subdued, for the Long Branch boat had left the dock before they reached it. Mary stretched herself on the sofa for a good cry, and Dorothy sought consolation in hanging a bowl-full of stockings out to dry.

While she was thus occupied the shutter across the way opened, and her neighbor stepped forth, a lot of wet clothes on his arm.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed, meeting the indignant light of Dorothy's blazing eyes. And straightway stumbled back into his den.

"Oh," thought Dorothy, "what have I done!"

She reached inside her window for an alpenstock (brought from the Catskills last summer and doing duty now as a mural decoration), and tapped her neighbor's casement with it.

He put his head out doubtfully. He had very respectful—and very beautiful—eyes.

"I—I beg your pardon," stammered Dorothy, "but—but—they won't dry white indoors."

ROMANCE OF A TIN ROOF

"Oh, it's of no consequence!" he said, blushing to the roots of his hair. "The washerwoman will get them to-morrow anyway. I just didn't know what to do with myself. I didn't know anybody was around."

"I—I'll lend you some clothes-pins," faltered Dorothy. Then feeling that she had done her best to make the man welcome to his own fire-escape, she retreated indoors to tell her troubles to Mary, who took delight in what had happened, and hoped that the man next door would give up his room because of the manifold disadvantages of the situation.

He played the mandolin, and played it well.

Sometimes, when they stepped on to the roof, they found him on his fire-escape, playing softly. He would stop instantly, and beat a hasty retreat.

They had begun to like him somehow, and to feel sorry for him. He seemed to be so lonely; like themselves, so poor; and he was so self-effacing in order that their free use of their roof might be uninterrupted.

One night, after their appearance had driven him to voluntary imprisonment behind his shutters, Mary with her guitar and Dorothy with her banjo took up the broken melody. Presently his mandolin began to answer, timidly, a note now and then.

A TIN ROOF

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AND A FIRE-ESCAPE

He no longer took flight when they appeared.

Unless very serious laundry operations were go-
ing forward.

Indeed, one Sunday Mary looked out of the
window to behold him, after hanging out his own
wash, seated on the fire-escape playing the man-
dolin to Dorothy while she hung out her stock-
ings. Various neighborly interchanges of soaps
and washing-sodas marked each week's intercourse.

"Hardly good form," mused Mary. "But it
isn't good form to be at all, if you've got to be
poor."

Almost every evening found the trio repeating
joint and sweet discourses on mandolin, banjo,
and guitar. He had a good voice, and the three
dropped into the way of singing all the jolly, pop-
ular new choruses together.

Bicycles constituted another bond of union.

It began by his stepping over from his fire-escape
and taking the job of cleaning her wheel off Mary's
hands one day. After that, he cleaned all the
wheels—his own included—on the roof.

Of course they got to riding together. He was
a blessing to them in this respect, for there were
rides they had longed to take and had never taken
because of having no male escort at command.

They had found out all about him.

He was a Southerner, a gentleman by birth and
breeding; and he was an art student, trying to

ROMANCE OF A TIN ROOF

make his way by illustrating magazines. Incidentally he owned several cameras, and his friends reveled in having their pictures taken—in hammock and off hammock, on wheels and off wheels.

"Can I bring my friend?"

The answer was a foregone conclusion. No, it was impossible, for behind Jack stood a tall, broad-shouldered young fellow, violin in hand. Moreover, Jack didn't wait for answer. He had come to look upon the roof with a sense of proprietorship. His hammock, potted plants, and other properties had taken position over there. He swung his long leg over the fire-escape, and his friend followed suit.

That was the first night of the quartet.

"Do you know whom we have entertained on the roof to-night?" asked Mary, when the guests had made their adieus and crossed back to Jack's over the fire-escape.

"Mr. De —,"

"Exactly. One of the Four Hundred. Member of an old Huguenot family, which has grown richer and more exclusive with every decade."

"This is becoming dreadful! I wonder whom Jack will bring up here next?"

"Jack's ways are inscrutable."

"I do hope," whimpered Dorothy, "he'll never

TIN ROOF

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ally, and his friends
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AND A FIRE-ESCAPE

find out who our grandpa was. It would be such
a disgrace to grandpa."

"He is bound to. In your wisdom you lent
grandpa's miniature to Jack for him to use in his
art work."

"Dear me! he must go among all our swell kins-
folk here! I do hope he won't tell them we're alive!"

In the room across the way the smoke from
Dick's cigar was describing pearly cloudlets around
grandpa's miniature, which Dick was regarding.

"By Jove!" he was saying, "a Vice-President's
granddaughters! And living that way!"

"Forbear, old fellow! I'm living that way,
you know."

"Oh, you—you're a man! That's different.
But old Vice-President ——'s granddaughters!"

"Well, he wouldn't be ashamed of them."

"Ashamed of them? By gad, no!"

"Cleverest girls I know. Wonderful how they
make a gentlewoman's home out of that fourth-
story den of theirs. Looks like an artist's studio
inside."

"How did they come to such straits?"

"Always been in them, I reckon."

"Then how the deuce did they pick up their ac-
complishments? When I took Mary over by the
chimney, because I thought you wanted a word
with that little 'Dot'——"

ROMANCE OF A TIN ROOF

"How good of you—so disinterested!"

"I'm always good—we dropped into French over your potted plants. She talks French like a Parisian."

"Mother was one. Father belonged to the American legation in Paris, married a French-woman—a singer—*mésalliance*, you see. Died soon after his return to Staten Island—after losing all his money in Wall street. His wife, never too cordially received—tho she was a splendid woman—shrank into herself; educated her daughters herself—and died, just as they were beginning to be useful."

"These girls," said the young man, speaking gravely, "have kindred here who would help them if their plight were known——"

"It will never be known."

Art had brought Jack and Dick together. The friendship begun before their easels in C——'s studio was strengthened by musical bonds; they drifted into the same glee-club; into the same wheeling club. Dick had money to burn, Jack had none. Dick lived in a Murray-Hill palace, and made Jack welcome to it; and Jack, a Southern thoroughbred of the purest strain, became it as a fine jewel a handsome setting; but he preferred his "attic" and the roof to palace and drawing-room. And since Dick was overfond of Jack, and

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AND A FIRE-ESCAPE

Jack wouldn't come to Dick, Dick went to Jack, and presently became a great frequenter of the roof.

His smart friends began to wonder what had become of him, and were scandalized to discover that he had taken up with typewriter girls—styl-
ish, pretty-looking girls, but typewriter girls, for all that, and girls who rode wheels on Sunday.

By this time Dick was so deliriously in love that he did not care what became of him. Ah! those long, beautiful rides under soft summer moons, up Riverside drive, to Yonkers, to Fort Lee, over the bridge to Brooklyn, and along the cycle-path to Coney—delightful, disreputable Coney, where they checked the wheels, and strolled out on the beach, and stretched themselves full length on the sands, and looked up at the stars or out on the ocean to the lights of passing ships; and sang snatches of songs, and jabbered nonsense; and ate sandwiches and hot tamales, and drank sarsaparilla, root-beer, and other abominations. "Sometimes," as Dorothy described these times years after in her Murray Hill home, "we fell so low that we actually drank clam-chowder!"

The four went bathing Saturday afternoons at Coney—than which nothing could be more perfectly dreadful, for everybody that's nobody washes himself at Coney Saturday afternoons, and nobody that's anybody ever goes there at all.

Dick proposed Manhattan Beach.

ROMANCE OF A TIN ROOF

"Oh, no!" said Mary. "We like Coney—Coney's so nice and common."

"Besides," said Dorothy, "your fine friends might catch you with us. And you'd want to introduce us, and they wouldn't want you to; and we shouldn't enjoy that."

There were some roof improvements after Dick's admittance. Rainy weather had been a trial to the trio.

"Oh, I wish that the weather wouldn't rain!
Oh, I wish that the weather wouldn't rain!
Pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, on the window-pane,
Pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, goes my heart's refrain!
For my true love I never can see,
(For our true loves we never can see)
As long as the weather will rain!
As long as the weather will rain!"

Dreadful dirges like this, with mandolin accompaniment on one side 'he brick wall and banjo and guitar on the other, afflicted neighborhood ears until skies cleared.

The addition which made the trio a quartet was unaccustomed to having his will crossed by small matters, and he was not going to let a little thing like rain work division between him and Mary. One night the girls returned from work, and stuck their heads out of the window, and behold! there was a wonderful awning-tent on the roof.

Sad times came to the roof people.

TIN ROOF

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AND A FIRE-ESCAPE

Jack had fever. Dick came and nursed him night and day; the girls crawled back and forth across the fire-escape, bearing bowls of gruel and beef-tea and little cups of jelly. When the fever was at its worst they took it turn about with Dick, and sat up all night too. Once they feared they must send him to the hospital, tho he rebelled against it with all his feeble might. Fortunately the fever was high and short.

With their own labors, the awful hot weather, their cramped quarters, and the care of Jack, the girls were ready to collapse when Jack began to convalesce. Fortunately September and their two weeks' vacation were at hand. Then the most delightful thing in life happened. Dick took them all off in his yacht. The quartet, with commendable regard for conventionalities, drummed up a couple of efficient but inoffensive chaperones, one of whom was Dick's aunt—a kind body, ready to give Dick the moon if he cried for it.

Would there ever be anything so beautiful in life as that two-weeks' cruise in Dick's yacht? Yet Dorothy came back with an ache in her heart. Mary, later met by Dick, was wooed and won, while here was Jack, who must know—how could he help when she had shown it so plainly to everybody when they thought he would die of the fever?—and who had never spoken a word of serious purpose. Perhaps poverty held him back—yet he

ROMANCE OF A TIN ROOF

might tell her so. A maiden's pride was worth something. Artists were light o' love—had she not heard that?

The moon looked down on the roof, and on Dorothy and Jack—studying astronomy perhaps. Dick had taken Mary to see his mother.

A mandolin and a banjo lay idle on a pile of cushions.

Jack was bubbling over with spirits. Why not? Artists are light o' love. His drawings were becoming all the rage in magazine circles, \$50 orders were snowing him under, and a great publishing house was about to send him abroad—indeed, he thought he might go on the same ship that took Dick and Mary on their bridal tour. Dick and Mary had besought her to accompany them—but no, she would not. What would become of her? The winter was coming; she would be shut in her lonely room; no roof garden, no anything. Poor Dorothy, try as she would, could not look in high feather.

"What's the matter, Dot? Thought you'd be glad of my luck. What you so glum about?"

"It's abominably hot," she yawned; "and I'm tired and sleepy too, Jack. I wish you'd go home."

"You're fibbing"—tenderly. "It's not the weather. Grieving about Mary, Dot?"

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AND A FIRE-ESCAPE

"Oh, yes"—carelessly—"about you all. With Mary and Dick married, and you gone, it will be 'like a banquet-hall deserted, whose lights are fled'——"

"Oh! you can count upon the moon, Dot. The moon shines in winter, you know."

"Don't be frivolous, Jack, about the moon. The moon's a serious matter. Really, I hate frivolity about the moon. Oh"—breaking down—"it's going to be dreadful—till Mary comes back."

"Always Mary."

"Well, isn't Mary my sister? And isn't an awful thing about to happen to her? Think of having to associate with the same man all your life. Seriously, I'm awful glad of her and Dick's happiness, but"—a sob—"it's going to be dreadful up here by myself. The quartet's been so jolly."

"The quartet? Dot, are you grieving just about the quartet—and Mary? Not a little bit about me—by myself? And I was such a happy poor devil when I came up here to-night. Now, I don't care about my good luck! Dot, I thought you'd be glad when I told you about my good luck—I thought you would. I thought you'd be willing to go with me. I can't give you yachts and a Fifth-avenue home, but—I thought you'd be glad—and be my little wife. And now you're too cross about Mary and Dick to care. Oh, Dot, you do! you do! My darling!"

